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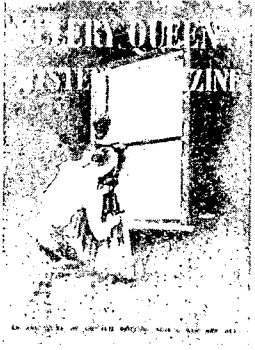

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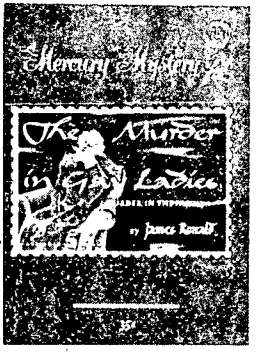

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SACRÉ BLEU!
WHO IS MONSIEUR DONAQUE?

Would it help you to remember him if we gave you his official designation — A124 of the French Secret Service? Or if we reminded you that he was "the most dreaded detective in all France"? The truth is, Monsieur Donaque is a sort of legend. When we think of the great fictional sleuths, from Dupin to Detective Duff, the name of Donaque sounds faintly reminiscent. We know it, or seem to know it, and yet we cannot place the name exactly. We do not find Monsieur Donaque listed in the Index of Howard Haycraft's MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *the definitive history of the detective story; yet, we have the persistent notion that Mr. Haycraft has at least referred to that renowned Gallic manhunter. And, indeed, Mr. Haycraft has: if you consult his "Who's Who in Detection," in Chapter XVIII of* MURDER FOR PLEASURE — "*a Quick Finding-List of the Best Known Sleuths of Fiction*" — *there is the name, Monsieur Donaque, on page 351. And that is all: no further mention of him, no titles of books in which he has appeared, no physical description, no estimate of his detective abilities — nothing but the name of his creator, Arthur Train. And yet, as you say the name Donaque aloud, wouldn't you swear it was a familiar one in the annals of criminal investigation?*

Well, we determined to track down this mysterious and legendary figure. For a long time now we have wanted to bring you an Arthur Train story; but, alas, the Mr. Tutt stories, for which Arthur Train is so justly famous, are not available for reprint. So we followed the trail of Donaque . . . and we could find no book by Arthur Train about Monsieur Donaque; nor could we find any reference to Donaque in any anthology, or for that matter in any other history or critique — by Carolyn Wells, H. Douglas Thomson, Marie F. Rodell, Thomas Narcejac.

Finally, we discovered a short story — a single short story, published as long ago as 1911. Was this single short story the basis of the vague legend which has always surrounded the name of Monsieur Donaque? Was a single short story all that existed of Donaque's exploits, the entire record of his criminological career? Was a single short story enough to justify Monsieur Donaque's name being included in Howard Haycraft's "list of the

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best known sleuths of fiction"? It appears so — at least, we have found only this one recorded investigation.

But we are happy, at long last, to smoke Monsieur Donaque out of his retirement. And although this one tale is all there is, "there isn't any more," we think you will agree that it represents almost the quintessence of what might be called the French bravura school — the grand and glorious school of Lecoq, Rouletabille, Lupin et Cie.

MONSIEUR DONAQUE

by ARTHUR TRAIN

MONSIEUR RENÉ DONAQUE WAS a slender little man with small hands and feet and a patent-leather face that never cracked. Few of the inhabitants of Paris ever saw him — but then, to be sure, he was rarely there. Nobody knew him. Officially he was designated as A124, and as such figured in the confidential reports of the French Secret Service. He may have had wife and children and a comfortable bourgeois little *foyer* somewhere in the suburbs — say at St. Cloud — but if he did, he kept it to himself. For silence to Monsieur Donaque was indeed golden, and silence was what made him the most valuable and at the same time the most expensive man in the service.

Whenever any particularly unusual situation arose which required governmental observation or action, the inspector would summon one of his *sous*-lieutenants and inquire, "Where is A124?" And the subordinate would reply, "Do you not recall, Monsieur le Directeur, he is at Vladivostok?" — or Nairobi or Quebec, as the case might be. And M. le Directeur would twirl his official mustache and remark, "*Mais oui*, whom the devil then shall I send?" To which the subordinate would inevitably reply that he had no idea, and the whole matter would end either in sending nobody at all or in flashing a code message summoning M. Donaque to return.

Flippancy aside, Donaque was one of those extraordinary men who exert a pronounced influence upon the life of their time without ever acquiring a personality. The nearest Donaque ever came to being described in the public press was when he was referred to occasionally in some prominent case as "an agent of the Secret Service."

Even the officials themselves knew him only as A124, and the secret records of the Bureau alone held the roster of his achievements. No living man other than Donaque himself could have told what mysteries he had

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solved, what murderers he had run to earth, what assassinations he had prevented, save that most of the successes of the department were his own. The natural result of this was that, when once Donaque had taken up a case, the entire resources of the government were at his command and remained so until he was through with them.

His ability, as in most similar instances, lay chiefly in his powers of observation. His father had been a clown in the Hippodrome and his mother a lady's maid, and they had compromised between a career for him on the sawdust and one below stairs by apprenticing him at the age of eight to a celebrated professor of legerdemain, who, in the fashion of Hermann the Elder, trained René's memory by conducting him through the Rue de Rivoli and insisting upon his recollecting all that he saw in the shop windows. As time went on he did, in fact, remember everything. At twelve he was a proficient assistant of his master. At fifteen he began to give exhibitions of his own. And at seventeen he disappeared.

The cause of this disappearance was simply that, by virtue of his appointment by an astute Chief of Bureau, he passed out of private and into public life — or, to speak more accurately, he surrendered the publicity which he had theretofore enjoyed as a private individual for the exceedingly private career offered him by a public position. At any rate, he ceased to exist. All that remained was an "intelligent force" — at the most, a shadowy form flickering in the middle distance like the ghostly hand at one of Palladino's *séances*. As a physical entity he had steel-gray eyes, muscles like whalebone, a good-natured, rather flattish nose, a broad, spraying mustache, and weighed about 115 pounds. Incidentally, he had red hair. A smart piano tuner or an aristocratic winder of clocks might have called him brother. In point of truth, he was one of the great men of France.

Donaque lived in a house without a number, in a street without a name, for his apartments were on the top story of an interior building which he reached through a secret entrance at the back of an apothecary's in the Rue Montesquieu. The apothecary was, in fact, one of his agents and acted as an unofficial concierge. The lower floors of the interior building were given over to various industries directed by Donaque himself. In one of them was an expert photographer who devoted himself to experimenting with telescopic apparatus, huge enlargements of microscopic impressions, and the radioactive effect of various elements through opaque solids upon the photographic plate. Just now he was devoting his attention chiefly to polonium, under the personal observation of Donaque, who (under the name of Blatt) was a student of the Curies, and who corresponded with them *via* Berlin under the pseudonym of Professor Adolph Lydenburg.

For when Donaque was not work-

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ing, he was studying. No one, least of all his associates, suspected that the red-headed young man in student's garb, who spoke French with such a Low German accent and who carried his books in a water-proof satchel and his lunch in a paper bag, was the most dreaded detective in all France. Yet it was so. Chemistry, pathology, bacteriology, and the higher mathematics were his tools, and he kept them sharp and free from rust. It was Donaque who had detected the bacillus of cerebro spinal meningitis in the remains of the breakfast of which the novelist Poulettiairie had partaken before his death in the apartment of Mlle. Hutchins, the American music-hall singer. And it was Donaque who had hypnotized her into confessing the connection of youthful Professor Otho Harrington with the crime. He had his own laboratories in the Rue Montesquieu, and through his special services to the government of Austria he had been able to secure a full grain of radium from the Joachimsthal Mine.

In the twenty years during which he had been in the governmental employ, Donaque had become rich — not in the pursuit of his profession, which yielded him but a paltry 40,000 francs per annum, but by means of the by-products of secret and novel information which his activities had disclosed to him. Thus he had made a modest fortune by accidentally discovering that he could artificially age wine by suspending in the cask a glass tube containing a small amount of radium chlorid. And this industry he secretly carried on in a large establishment just inside the walls of Paris under the name of "Clement et Cie." Most of the money he expended in individual scientific research.

"In the old days," he had said to Dupré, his assistant, on one of those rare occasions when he said anything, "men killed each other with battle-axes or by tiles thrown from the roofs of houses — you recall the death of Pyrrhus, I observe. Today the only dangerous criminals are those who avail themselves of the weapons afforded by the recent discoveries of science. What France, what any nation has most to fear, is the pestilence that walketh in darkness and the destruction that wasteth in noonday, either of natural origin or artificially stimulated. The individual, save for the knife of the Apache, has more to fear from electricity than from any form of open violence. The only crimes that are not puerile are those which utilize the unknown for their accomplishment."

The rooms given over to Donaque's private use indicated nothing as to his personal tastes or character. His bedroom contained only an iron cot, his dressingroom but a mammoth chest of drawers marked with various letters, and his library naught but a long table set between two windows which overlooked the city, and on which stood four telephones: the first connected directly with the Ministry of War, the second with the Prefecture of Police, the third with the

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various floors and offices of his own establishment, and the last with the general telephonic system of Paris. At the farther end of the room stood a wireless apparatus. A map of the world, showing all railroad and steamship lines, a shelf of automatic firearms, and a case containing row upon row of tiny vials completed the furnishing of the apartment. A bright red rug covered the floor.

In this most extraordinary establishment the casings of the doors and windows were of steel, rows of electric buttons lined the panels, and a silence reigned comparable only to that of a country cemetery. Not a single note of luxury was to be seen; no photograph of friend, no trophy of the chase, no souvenir of travel adorned the walls. It was the office of a man always on duty.

On the evening of which we write, Donaque, at about ten o'clock, entered the apothecary's and passed without stopping through a small door in the extreme rear into a tiny electric elevator. This started of its own accord and automatically came to a gentle stop when it had reached the level of his apartments, the door of which was opened by some process inexplicable to the ordinary observer, and Donaque was in his home, fortress, office — what you will. A cornice-light filled the room with a gentle glow, while a green-shaded lamp on the table served for reading purposes.

Dupré came from an adjoining room and relieved his master of his hat and Inverness coat.

"The Prefect of Police desires you to speak to him at once," said the assistant. "These papers came five minutes ago by the pneumatic tube from the Bureau."

He laid a heavily sealed blue packet upon the table beneath the lamp. Donaque lit a cigarette and tore it open unceremoniously.

"By courtesy of the Ministry of the Interior you have been assigned to investigate the recent death of M. Faubert at the château of the so-called Baroness Berlitz at Neuilly-le-Réal," it began. He ran his eyes hurriedly, but carefully, over the remainder of the note. It was signed by the Chief of the Bureau of Secret Service.

"Dupré," he said, without further inspection of the papers.

"Yes, Monsieur," returned the assistant, instantly on his toes.

"Bring me the clippings from my files relating to the death of M. Faubert — also the papers concerning the history of one Louise Berlitz, otherwise known as Fräulein Schmidt, of Vienna and Berlin. I leave for Neuilly-le-Réal on the first morning train. Valise No. 5 will do — no, No. 7. Give me pocket case No. 2 containing the ethodes. Yes, you will accompany me. Kindly notify the Prefect of Police and apologize for my failing to speak to him myself."

Without further ado Donaque threw off his clothes, glanced at his weight upon a self-registering pair of

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scales made in Indianapolis, U.S.A., and, taking up a book, threw himself upon his cot and read himself to sleep.

The early morning train from the Gare du Nord carried with it in a second-class compartment a red-haired man of between thirty-five and forty years of age, who was engaged in devouring a huge package of clippings. Beside him sat a gentleman of far more distinguished appearance, who was none other than Dupré, his assistant. As neither was known, neither was in the slightest degree disguished. Donaque might easily have passed for an Irish, English, or German newspaper correspondent, while his associate resembled, as much as anybody, M. Renaud of the Chicago Opera Company. On the shelf above them rested a valise (No. 7), bearing the name J. Katz, Leipsic. Donaque, riding backward, perused his clippings for upward of eighty kilometres before raising his eyes. Dupré slept peacefully. Across the aisle a little German professor in horn spectacles gazed out of the window and fidgeted. He had been up since three o'clock so as to be sure not to miss the train. He caught Donaque's eye and brightened.

"You are from Leipsic, I see," began the professor.

"Yes," answered Donaque.

The professor felt encouraged. Dupré opened his eyes and immediately closed them again. After a pause the professor made another start.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he remarked, fumbling in a large green wallet. "Herr Professor Karl Schwintz of Heidelberg." He produced a stained *carte de visite*, which he tendered to Donaque, who took it without comment.

"I am honored, Herr Professor," replied the detective in flawless German. "I carry my own name on my pack." He lifted his eyes.

"A very flat country!" continued the professor after a pause. Donaque vouchsafed no reply.

"There is much that is creditable in its scholarship, however," the professor added authoritatively.

"Yes?" returned Donaque quietly.

"The discoveries of Mme. Curie, for instance, will ever be a glory to France. It is not likely that the Fatherland will — but who can say? Yet the discovery of radium has revolutionized the fundamental conceptions of science."

Donaque looked interested, and the professor, glorying in a listener, proceeded to deliver one of his lectures. Radium, he was rejoiced to inform Herr Katz, was one of the epoch-making discoveries of the world. Its energy was inexhaustible. A single ounce of it — could it be obtained — would drive a battleship at forty miles an hour — forever. In it had been discovered the secret of perpetual motion. Its rays were so powerful that an appreciable quantity could not be held in the hand without inflicting painful burns. You could cure disease with it!

"Marvelous!" said Donaque.

Yes, it was even so! returned the

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enthusiast. There was only about an ounce and a half of the element in the entire world. Most of it was owned by governments which had ruthlessly preëmpted all the pitchblende deposits. They would not sell it even to the scientists. What a pity! The professor had been trying to buy some in Paris. He had saved 2500 marks and wished to purchase for experimental purposes a tiny pinch of it, but no, Mme. Curie would not sell a particle of the strength he desired for less than 5000 francs! So he was returning disappointed. The tears almost came into the old gentleman's watery eyes. Did Herr Katz have any conception of the extraordinary speed at which the rays traveled — 10,000 miles a second?

"You are thinking of the cathode ray," quietly interrupted Donaque. "The velocity of the Beta particle of radium is 170,000 miles per second. However, your enthusiasm deserves some encouragement. When you return to Heidelberg drop a line to this gentleman" — he scribbled a name on the back of the professor's card — "and perhaps he can do something for you. I am getting out here. Good day!"

The matter that Donaque had been delegated to investigate was one which had aroused the curiosity of all France. Fräulein Schmidt had appeared in Paris a few years before and dazzled society no less by her brilliant wit than by her beauty. Rumors of a somewhat highly-colored past had before long, however, led the more decorous to close their doors to her; but she had continued to have a salon of her own, which was thronged by the cleverest and most distinguished men of the day. Presently she had married Valentin, a very rich banker. The union seemed happy, but suddenly her husband had fallen a victim to a mysterious disease and had died.

After a period suitable for mourning, Madame Valentin returned to the world and again gathered around her a brilliant circle. Her entertainments were the talk of society, her dinners astonished even the gourmets of Paris, and her lavishness of expenditure created a furore of excitement. She became the most celebrated woman of the period — a de Staël and a Récamier in one. Wines were named after her. Racing stables wore her colors. Even the President of the Republic was whispered to be among her admirers.

And then quite unexpectedly she married again — this time a Baron Berlitz, a gentleman who had made a fortune in American copper stocks, annexed a title, and started on his way to renown, *via* Maxim's and Longchamps. He had purchased for his bride a wonderful old château, refurnished it entire, executed a will in her favor, and had then, like his unfortunate predecessor in the lady's affections, most considerately died — of paralysis, it was said. The coincidence did not pass without considerable comment.

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On the return to Paris of the Baroness Berlitz, the attitude of society toward her changed. She was as brilliantly charming as ever, her banquets were as exquisite, her face and figure in half mourning even more alluring, her *ménage* as distinguished, but something was altered. An unseen filament of cloud shadowed her sun. There were those who said that it presaged her social eclipse. These, however, were wrong. Though she shone with a difference, she shone in much the same orbit. Men no longer spoke of her as a possible *parti*, but perhaps as a mistress. And as if she desired to compensate herself for the undeniable loss of her previous popularity, she plunged into a riot of extravagance that made Paris gasp, used as it was to American multimillionaires. It seemed incredible that even the fortune of a Berlitz could stand the drain — and just about this time the Minister of Finance entered the running.

M. Faubert was an immensely popular man. Risen from the people, he had won his spurs as an orator and had then, with great foresight, organized a party of his own. It was exactly what was needed at the moment, and M. Faubert became, in due course, although by training a wine merchant, the head of the national resources. He had been a jovial, brusque, loud-voiced man of hearty middle-age, who brooked no interference with his policies, and prided himself upon his indifference to conventions. In a month after her recrudescence, his attentions to the widow Berlitz had become the subject of widespread gossip. They were inseparable — driving, attending the opera, dining at the restaurants, always together. It was not exactly a scandal; it was simply a matter of public interest. They had been seen at the races on Monday last, dined at the Hotel Continental on Tuesday — and on Friday morning Paris awoke to learn that M. Faubert had died quietly, if unexpectedly, at the château of Madame the Baroness Berlitz at Neuilly-le-Réal on the preceding evening, of paralysis.

On Friday morning Donaque had been called back from London. It was now Saturday noon.

Among the papers contained in the blue envelope which Dupré had handed to him the evening before was a document entitled "Preliminary Report of Secret Inquest upon the death of M. Faubert." It was typewritten upon thin sheets just as it had been taken from the wire an hour or two before. This formed the basis of the information upon which Donaque was ordered to act. But its details were meager enough. A bare half-dozen witnesses summoned by the mayor of Neuilly-le-Réal had testified in substance that M. Faubert, who had been visiting at the Château Berlitz (a fact unknown either to his official *confrères* or his family) had been found dead in his bed on Thursday morning by the valet who had gone to wake him. He was fully dressed, as if he had lain

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down for a moment before preparing to retire, and there was nothing to indicate whereof he had died. He had dined with the Baroness the evening before and had seemed in excellent health and spirits.

The valet's name was Bertrand, and he had been the chief witness. The others consisted of Pierre Fragonard, the butler; Jules Tonnetti, a constable who had taken charge of the body prior to the inquest; Marie Reddon, a *femme de chambre;* and Edmond Pepin, the local doctor, who deposed that there was no mark of violence upon the body and that death had occurred from natural causes, to wit, instantaneously, from paralysis.

Arriving at Neuilly-le-Réal, Donaque went at once to the rooms of the inn which Dupré had engaged for him by wire the preceding evening. Having freshened his appearance, he ordered a light lunch, sent for the head of the local constabulary, and from him learned what he already knew relative to the inquest. The only additional fact which he acquired was that the body of M. Faubert had been sent to Paris for burial.

Donaque transferred a few small articles from the valise to his pockets, instructed his valet to be at the inn door with a trap at half-past six, and, after ascertaining the whereabouts of the château, lit a cigarette and started for a walk. Three miles below the village he came upon the wall that bounded the estate and ran parallel to the road. A little farther on, he saw towers rising through the oaks on a slight elevation above the river. Soon he came to an iron gateway and a porter's lodge. He kept on up the hill that corresponded with the plateau upon which stood the château.

Presently he came to an open field from which a flock of crows, cawing disgustedly, arose at his approach. This he crossed, and gained the crest of the hill, where a huge oak topped the others. He swung himself up through the branches until he could look over the intervening trees. Below him, not more than a quarter of a mile away, lay the château, in the centre of a level lawn that reached at least a hundred yards in each direction. A speck of white fluttered under one of the trees. From his pocket Donaque drew a pair of field-glasses, which he focused carefully. Through them he could see plainly a woman, dressed in flimsy summer garments, who wandered in and out among the tree trunks. Presently a man appeared on the lawn and beckoned to her. Both then entered the house.

Donaque telescoped his glasses and descended from his perch. He had seen enough for the time being. The prefect had said that there were no guests at the château at the time of the Minister's demise, yet obviously there was one there now. He strolled leisurely back to the village.

One feature of the case still called for some attention. Two witnesses had not been summoned to testify at the inquest — Madame the Baron-

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ess Berlitz herself, and the undertaker. The first he would interview in due course, during his investigation proper. The other he would see now.

It took only a moment's inquiry to ascertain that the undertaker and the sexton of the village church were one and the same functionary — an aged gentleman with silvery hair and a voluble if not silver tongue. Donaque found him sitting upon a bench, smoking his afternoon pipe.

"Have I the honor to be addressing His Excellency the Mayor?" inquired Donaque, approaching him by a flank movement.

The old sexton bridled with pleasure. No, he protested, he was *not* the mayor (thanking the gentleman all the same) — he had no such luck! He was simply a humble servant of the church and its children — a sexton.

Donaque accepted the proffered seat at the old man's side and gently drew him on. Presently, quite by chance, they were discussing the sudden death of M. Faubert. The sexton with pride told how he had visited the château and had personally prepared the body for shipment to Paris. He had had a guard, too — a gendarme, all the time. It was no small affair, that!

"What was the name of the gendarme?" inquired Donaque.

"Tonnetti," answered the sexton. "There he is now, the lazy lout, on that corner, over there. You see, the way it was, was this: I had just had my coffee when Mathilde, my wife, cries out that someone is coming. So I rush to the door and who is there but M. Bertrand, the valet. 'M. Faubert is dead,' says he, 'and you must come to lay him out.' 'Alack!' I answered, 'and what did he die of?' — for, to tell you the truth, I had no idea that the gentleman in question was the great Minister of Finance. 'Some sudden shock,' he replied. 'It is inexpressibly sad.' So I put on my hat and jumped into the trap with him. On the way we stopped at the mayor's house and told him, and he sent Jules to wait there, until some of the proper officials might arrive — such as the coroner and his physician.

"Well, you may be sure that by that time I was highly excited; but I kept my wits together and presently we were driving up the great avenue to the château. But you should see those oaks, my friend! They are wonderful! A servant in livery opened the door and conducted us up the marble stairs to a magnificent *chambre de luxe*, where lay M. Faubert, the distinguished statesman. He reclined upon the bed, his head slightly to the left. M. Bertrand raised the shutters, which had been closed out of respect for the deceased, and asked to be excused. Jules, there, sat like a great ox on the couch and constantly repeated the words '*Magnifique! Extraordinaire!*' as if he might never be in such a place again.

"So I busied myself at my work, and, do not laugh, M'sieu — but observe how close, after all, are the

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great and lowly — 'on the turf and under the turf' all men are equal. Well, as I was saying, M. Faubert was fully dressed in elegant clothes — clothes for evening such as are worn in the great cities — with a fine white waistcoat; but there was one little thing he had not — what do you suppose, eh? Will you believe me, M'sieu, when I tell you (but it is a fact) that the great M. Faubert had no button in the back of his collar! I glanced about on the floor and upon the cabinets, but there was none. So in a moment of inspiration I removed my own — a modest one of bone such as you may buy for a sou — and put it on him! And now the great statesman is to be buried in the old sexton's bone collar-button! Which all goes to prove, does it not, that all men are created equal?"

The long shadows of the oaks reached across the lawn, and the weather-vanes upon the towers swam in the last glimmering shafts of the setting sun when Donaque drove up the graveled drive to the massive carved door of the château.

"Madame denies herself to everybody," declared the liveried lackey who responded to Donaque's summons in a manner ill concealing a congenital insolence. It did not escape Donaque, who had instantly taken the fellow's measure. He scribbled something upon a card.

"Take that to your mistress and be quick about it!" said he. A few minutes later the servant reappeared.

"Madame la Baronne will see Monsieur," he announced, opening wide the door and hurrying to remove Donaque's valise from the trap.

Donaque followed the man up a flight of winding marble steps, above which floated the tattered banners of ancient France. Through mullioned windows the parti-colored lights of sunset illuminated their stained but vividly glowing reds and purples. At the head of the staircase they came to the door of a huge salon with polished floor and exquisite furniture of the period of the last Louis. The candles were already lighted in the sconces, and in the conflicting light Donaque could see a woman with masses of yellow hair reclining in a *chaise longue* upon a rug made of the skin of a polar bear.

Donaque entered unannounced.

The woman raised a pair of dark gray eyes and shot a penetrating look across the room — the look of a woman harassed by nervousness or fear, yet mistress of herself and of the situation.

"Enter, Monsieur. To what, may I ask, am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" she asked coldly.

Donaque approached to within a dozen paces and bowed courteously.

"The Republic, Madame, is deeply afflicted at the loss of so useful a public servant as M. Faubert."

The Baroness made a gesture of impatience.

"And am I to suffer intrusion and annoyance, in consequence, for the next six months?" she demanded.

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Donaque shrugged his shoulders. "The Republic, Madame, is deeply interested in the manner of his death."

The woman started in spite of herself.

"Does the Minister of War suspect that violence was committed? How ridiculous! The inquest has disposed of all such foolish suspicions. There is no one here ——"

She stopped abruptly, and her eyes searched his face.

"Yes, Madame, you have seen me before. Perhaps Madame can recollect."

For a moment the Baroness hesitated. "You are mistaken," she answered deliberately. "I have not the honor of Monsieur's acquaintance."

"A thousand pardons, Madame!" replied Donaque, as if pained at the necessary contradiction. "At the Hotel d'Espagne, in the year 1898, I had the pleasure of attending for a day Fräulein Lena Schmidt, or Henchel, as I believe you then were."

Her face paled almost imperceptibly under the candle-light. "May I ask your business?" she inquired carelessly.

"An agent of the Secret Service of France," he answered. "I am known by various names. Herr Vogel, I believe I called myself at Vienna when we last met. That will do as well as any."

"Vogel?" she repeated, as if endeavoring to evoke some shape out of the gray mists of the past. "Vogel?"

"Yes, Madame."

"What do you want with me?" she cried.

"I must know how M. Faubert met his death."

Her lids drooped over her gray eyes. "Yes? And how will you proceed?"

"By the ordinary methods of investigation."

Her jeweled fingers played lightly on the inlay of the table beside her. "I am at your service, Monsieur."

Donaque bowed. "It will be necessary, and I trust not embarrassing, that I pay Madame the Baroness a short visit."

"What!" she demanded incredulously. "Here? Absurd!"

"It must be so, Madame," he returned. "Otherwise ——" He paused meaningly.

"It will save Madame much inconvenience," he concluded gently.

The Baroness laughed. "Monsieur, you — the Republic of France does me too much honor!"

"I beg of Madame not to be displeased," petitioned Donaque.

"And if I refuse?"

"Paris."

The Baroness paused for a full half-minute. "I prefer Neuilly," she smiled through her pallor. "What are Monsieur's wishes?"

"To pass the next few hours precisely as did M. Faubert before he died!" announced Donaque sharply.

The Baroness gave an enigmatical smile. "As Monsieur wishes!"

She touched a china bell upon the tripod at her elbow, and the lackey

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entered. "Monsieur will remain here for the night. Send for Bertrand."

For the space of three minutes Donaque and the woman eyed each other narrowly. At the end of that time a handsome, bronzed, broad-shouldered man in the dress of a valet entered.

"Show Monsieur to the chamber occupied by M. Faubert last Wednesday night," said the Baroness in a peculiar voice, the timbre of which aroused long-forgotten memories in Donaque. "M'sieu will dress for dinner? Yes — Bertrand, see that Monsieur is properly taken care of."

Donaque gave her a low bow. "Madame is too kind!" he smiled. "May I ask if you have other guests staying with you?"

The Baroness shook her head. "I am alone, Monsieur."

Bertrand conducted Donaque up another flight of stairs and down a hall to the huge bedchamber described by the old sexton. The sun had sunk behind the trees, and in the recesses of the room a silvery dusk had already gathered; but the valet touched a button near the door and flooded them with the light of a multitude of electric lamps. The chief object of furniture was a magnificent Louis XIV canopied bed.

"The bath is here, Monsieur," said the valet, with a slightly Teutonic accent, opening a door near the head of the bed.

Donaque nodded. He was less interested in the toilet arrangements than in the man himself, for to the detective's observant eye he was no more a valet than an ass masquerading in a lion's skin. If this man were, in fact, a servant, he was one accustomed to the unusual occupations of tennis, hunting, and other forms of outdoor sport. He could never have acquired such a tan below-stairs.

"You are a Frenchman?" suddenly inquired Donaque.

"Yes," replied the man uneasily, "Alsace."

His bearing and demeanor were not unlike those of a man accustomed to be waited on himself, and his lowering brows and coal-black eyes indicated a temper less usual in a servant than a master.

"What time is dinner?" asked Donaque, throwing himself into a big chair and taking a cigarette from his pocket with a deliberation of which the ostensible valet took no advantage to offer him a light.

"In three-quarters of an hour, M'sieu."

"I will rest here," said Donaque. "You need not remain."

"I will then fetch Monsieur's valise," answered Bertrand. He bowed slightly and left the room, leaving the door open.

Donaque watched his shadow vanish down the hallway. Then he sprang from his chair and minutely examined the great bed in which M. Faubert had breathed his last. Next he ran his fingers over the panels of the walls, peered into the vases, of which there were several, shook the folds of the hangings, and took a

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rapid survey of the bathroom. His entire inspection did not occupy more than three minutes, and he had regained his chair and remained there motionless for a full quarter of an hour more before the valet's footfalls echoed on the stairs.

In his right hand he carried Donaque's valise, but its weight was hardly enough to account for the tiny drops gathered upon his brow or the nervousness of his steps. Fear and hate struggled for supremacy in his eyes. Something had occurred during his absence to unsteady his nerves. Donaque had expected that it would occur. Yet he had not expected that the signs of it would be so obvious. That the Baroness should seize her opportunity was only natural, however, and only by giving her the opportunity could he hope to learn her secret. He was deliberately staking his life in order that he might discover how she would attempt to take it.

But to Donaque this was part of the game. Therein lay the humor of his request "to pass the next few hours precisely as did M. Faubert before he died," and her direction to Bertrand to "see that Monsieur is properly taken care of." Donaque, lazily smoking his cigarette, with an open novel in his lap, was waiting with lynx-like intensity to see in just what manner he was going to be "cared for."

Bertrand laid the valise upon the bed and, opening it, commenced to lay out in an orderly manner Donaque's evening clothes. The detective appeared to resume the reading which he had momentarily interrupted to toss the valet the key of the valise.

"Monsieur will bathe?"

"Yes," answered Donaque, without raising his eyes.

Bertrand moved to the adjoining bathroom and turned on the water. Behind, upon the bed, lay, neatly arranged, Donaque's underclothes, socks, trousers, waistcoat, collar, tie, and shirt. Bertrand returned and fumbled with the shirt. His fingers seemed to be all thumbs, but finally he inserted the collar-button in the back and fastened thereto the collar. Donaque arose slowly from where he was sitting and closed the door of the chamber, as if to insure the privacy necessary for dressing; but before his hand left the knob his fingers deftly turned the key in the lock and removed it. Then he sauntered toward the bed.

"I observe," he remarked carelessly, nursing his mustache with one hand, "that you have presented me with a collar-button." Bertrand gave an involuntary start and tried ineffectually to speak.

"I —" he stammered at last, avoiding the eyes of Donaque — "Monsieur had no button in his collar, and I took the liberty of offering him one of my own."

"Very kind of you," replied Donaque, taking up the shirt and examining the humble implement in question. It was a sufficiently ordinary-looking affair, and differed from those

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which one purchases in the shops only in that it seemed to be made of silver instead of brass.

"Very kind of you, indeed," repeated the detective. "But I am unaccustomed to collar-buttons of silver — in fact, I am rather eccentric in my manner of dress, and have a pronounced penchant for buttons of brass. No doubt you have another, eh? Would it be asking too much to request you, for instance, to remove the one you have on and exchange it for this?" Bertrand turned pale.

"Certainly, if Monsieur will be so kind as to permit me to remove the one now in the shirt, I will fetch him another button from my room."

"You would not care to wear this one yourself?" he asked mockingly. "Does it by any chance resemble the one worn by M. Faubert on the night of his death?"

He detached it from the neckband of the shirt and held it before the eyes of the valet, who with an oath leaped to one side and struck the object from Donaque's fingers.

"Pig of a Frenchman!" he gasped and, springing to the door, tried to open it. Then, for the first time realizing that his escape was barred, he gave vent to a snarl of rage and faced Donaque defiantly, his face transformed into that of a beast.

"Come, my friend," said Donaque soothingly. "Do not resort to violence."

For answer Bertrand suddenly extinguished the lights. For a moment the two held their breath in silence. The curtains had been drawn, and the darkness of night was in the room — a darkness heavy, thick, oppressive as that of a jungle. Yet in the darkness one solitary gleam of light was visible — a pale, bluish glow like a bead of phosphorus in the wake of a boat's stern — from beneath a table in a distant corner of the great room. Donaque knew that the man's first thought would be to regain possession of the fantastic instrument of death to which the ingenuity of his mistress had resorted, a means undemonstrable without the implement itself — the collar-button of M. Faubert!

For a moment the silence was unbroken save for the heavy breathing of the valet; then Donaque heard the nap of the carpet softly stir under stealthily, cat-like footsteps. Bertrand was moving toward the bead of light. Donaque silently crept in the same direction, keeping pace with the almost noiseless noise of the other's feet.

They had now covered the length of the room, and the shape of the button as it lay upon its side under the table was distinctly visible. Donaque, by some exteriorized power of sense, felt the valet stoop and stretch his arm toward the spot of light. This was the moment for him to act. Silently Donaque sprang, his fingers clutching for Bertrand's throat. At the same moment his head came in contact with an intervening object which fell with a crash, carrying him with it. For an instant he lay half-stunned. The sound of heavy breath-

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ing and of scrambling feet told him that Bertrand had secured the prize. The next move of the valet would be to make good his escape — through the window, probably.

In an instant Donaque was on his feet again, creeping toward the windows. He could no longer hear or see anything. He stopped and peered through the darkness. At the same instant, not three feet from him and at about the same distance from the floor, suddenly reappeared a bluish blur of light. Slowly it moved in a horizontal direction across the room. Donaque's pulse quickened as he realized that the valet, in his excitement, had forgotten the penetrating quality of the rays of radium. Two feet above the glow Donaque knew were Bertrand's shoulders; above them was Bertrand's head. The man was at his mercy.

Measuring his distance, Donaque darted behind the valet and, getting a stranglehold upon his neck, pressed a tiny sphere of glass to the man's nose and mouth, cracking it to flinders, as he did so, between his fingers. A sharp, pungent odor pierced the air as with a knife, and Bertrand collapsed without a struggle.

A moment later, in the white light of the electric lamps, Donaque examined his victim curiously as he snapped a pair of slender chains upon the man's wrists and ankles and thrust a gag made of a bath-towel into his mouth. The little ethode had done its work well and quickly — more accurately and usefully than any firearm. He had taken his man alive — so much more business-like than putting the final quietus upon him and by an enforced silence destroying his usefulness forever.

"As I expected!" muttered Donaque, as his fingers came in contact in another of the valet's pockets with a tiny case of lead, the interior of which bore the imprint of a collar-button. The detective placed the button inside it and, closing the case, concealed it carefully in an inside pocket of his coat. No rays, however powerful, could penetrate that magic wall of lead. The giant was chained and helpless until Donaque should see fit to release him; the genie was in his bottle — and that genie was worth, in the specie of France, exactly 60,000 francs!

He dragged Bertrand to the foot of the bed and tied him there, helpless, with its linen sheets. The little clock of Dresden on the mantel struck the quarter. Donaque was beginning to feel hungry. The water was still running in the bathroom. The valet remained unconscious. Glancing first at the door, the detective unconcernedly removed his clothes and took a bath, after which he dried himself with the remaining bath-towel, and donned his evening clothes. Then he repacked his valise, placed it outside, and, locking the door of the chamber, thrust the key into his pocket.

"I trust Bertrand has made you quite comfortable?" asked the Baroness, as she indicated the seat opposite

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her own at the great table in the dining-room a few moments later.

The detective raised his glass to his lips. "He was more than attentive."

Donaque ate with a good appetite, enjoying the deftness and rapidity of the service, and the daintiness of the china and table linen. Such things outside his own business appealed to him. Likewise he gave his unstinted admiration to the subtle beauty of the woman before him, the perfect outline of whose features was just beginning to show the fullness of maturity. Her self-control was superb; yet now and then she betrayed a nervousness which he fully appreciated. She was wondering, watching, waiting for him to show some sign of the deadly effect of the genie in the bottle. Fish followed soup, and an entrée the fish. The best of French and German wines filled the glasses at his elbow, and no restaurant of Paris could have surpassed this strange meal in culinary perfection. The Baroness talked lightly of the country round, the history of the château — even of M. Faubert, praising his great qualities of mind and spirit. The dessert was removed, and a serving man passed coffee and liqueurs, with slender Persian cigarettes. His hostess placed one between her lips, lighted it, and with elbows on the table sent a challenging glance through the smoke to the man sitting so calmly opposite her.

"And, so far, are you satisfied with the manner in which M. Faubert spent his last evening upon earth?"

"Truly, after such a banquet, with so charming and beautiful a hostess, one would choose either to live on forever in her company or — to die leaving the memory of it undisturbed," answered Donaque.

The Baroness laughed, flattered at a compliment even from a police official. Moreover, the grotesque and bitter humor of the situation — for Donaque — appealed to her. Before midnight he would be no longer to be feared.

"It is always thus, my friend, is it not?" said she. "Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself, for tomorrow you die."

Donaque read her thoughts. Inside his mask he, too, was laughing. "So soon?" he smiled.

"Perhaps," she answered, with half-closed eyes. "If not," she added, "we might be friends."

For a moment the detective made no reply. Then he laid down his cigarette and leaned forward. "Madame," said he abruptly, "have you continued your investigations into the mysteries of radium?"

"I?" she cried. "Radium?"

"Yes, Madame," returned Donaque. "I had always supposed that you had the great fortune to possess an appreciable quantity of that invaluable element. Am I not correct?"

The eyes of the Baroness narrowed to mere slits, and involuntarily she placed her left hand upon her breast. "Why do you ask me that?"

"Because," returned Donaque, "I have found it important in my profession to acquaint myself with some accuracy as to the whereabouts of

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such amounts of the element as may be available. For instance, I note that as Lena Schmidt you twice purchased during the year 1899 as much as a quarter-grain through Dublatz of Leipsic. That is no inconsiderable quantity. A few years later my records show that half a grain came into your possession through your acquaintance with Dr. Giesel. Within eighteen months I am informed you secured an entire grain from the Austrian government by means of the intermediation of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs and the influence of no less a person than M. Faubert."

The cigarette dropped from the delicate fingers of the Baroness Berlitz, and a dusky pallor spread across her face. The gleam in her eyes changed from that of the tigress to that of a frightened fox. But Donaque appeared to be deep in his own thoughts.

"You and I know the wonderful qualities of this mysterious element; yet it is strange how little the world at large is acquainted with its almost supernatural powers — its terrible effect upon the human body, for example, when placed in juxtaposition with a vital part. I have often wondered at the infrequency with which it has been used as a means to take human life, for it leaves no trace behind it. Only one case I know — that of a dentist who filled his victim's tooth with a composition containing radium bromide. The man died in horrible agony within a few days — yet no doctor suspected the cause of the frightful abscess which formed upon his jaw."

Donaque stopped and shot a glance across the table at the Baroness, who sat rigid, her teeth fastened in her lower lip, her bosom heaving rapidly.

"How easy it would be," continued Donaque relentlessly, "to cause death by inducing a person to wear near his spinal cord some little object containing a couple of grains of radium — say a collar button?"

The Baroness uttered a gasping cry and pressed her hands to her temples.

"Like this," he added taking from his pocket the lead case and laying it open upon the table. "Like this."

The woman sprang to her feet, overturning several of the glasses and gazing wildly at Donaque.

"Bertrand!" It was a cry for help.

"He will not come, Madame!" said Donaque gravely. "But perhaps you will go to *him?* Is it asking too much?" She stared at him helplessly.

"This evening I have been your guest," continued Donaque. "I must beg the privilege of returning your hospitality. I must request you to become for a little time the guest of the Republic of France. Tomorrow morning the newspapers will print the news that there is a shortage in the accounts of the Ministry of Finance amounting to 5,000,000 francs. Are you ready, Madame?"

A look of despair crossed her face, and her lips framed the noiseless word, "Where?"

"To Paris, Madame," answered Donaque:

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Here is another A. H. Z. Carr story which will get under your skin, dig into your emotions . . . It was written at a time in Mr. Carr's life when he was turning out purely romantic tales for "slick" magazines, and represents his reaction against moonlight-and-roses. In order to save himself, as Mr. Carr puts it, from developing sugar on the brain, he would occasionally write a deliberately wicked or sardonic tale — just to please himself. These stories used to upset Mr. Carr's literary agent dreadfully, and he remembers his agent once saying: "Don't you know any nice people to write about?" It is interesting to record that most of the stories in this group of sanity-savers were never published . . .

HIT AND RUN

by A. H. Z. CARR

ONE SUMMER'S DAY, A SATURDAY, Mr. Peabody left the office where he was employed at a salary of $100 a week as a writer of advertising copy, and went cheerfully to his garage. The garage was not actually his, of course; it was a seven-story building which housed, with a thousand others, Mr. Peabody's automobile; but in Mr. Peabody's conversation it was "his garage," just as the firm that employed him was "his firm," the bank which charged him $2 every month for the privilege of keeping a troublesome account there, was "his bank," and the apartment house in which he rented a one-room bachelor's apartment, was "his house." Even Mr. Peabody's green sports-model car was his only in the same sense; for some 60 per cent of its ownership still lay with the finance company, and Mr. Peabody's payments were long overdue. The fact is that Mr. Peabody owned nothing, and owed everyone.

He was not, however, depressed by, nor even acutely aware of, any insecurity in his economic position. As a sophisticated New Yorker, twelve years from the Middle West, he knew that incomes were meant to be lived beyond; he was inured to the devices by which the metropolite extricates himself from one embarrassment by becoming involved in the next: pays for his clothes — when the account has been turned over to a lawyer — by withholding the rent; pays the rent — after the dispossess notice has been served — by borrowing from a friend; pays the friend — after the friendship has been ruined — by borrowing from a bank; pays the bank — when the friends who endorsed his note are being dunned — by obtain-

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ing an advance on his salary from his employers, who thereupon deduct the sum in small amounts from his weekly stipend; after which, the cycle begins again.

At the garage Mr. Peabody had the misfortune to meet the manager, who smiled mechanically and said, "We'd like to get a little check from you, Mr. Peabody."

Mr. Peabody looked a little surprised, and a little hurt. "Oh, yes," he said. "I was looking for your bill yesterday. Must have mislaid it. Just send me a new one, and I'll take care of it." He waved his hand casually, and passed on.

"Okay," said the manager, wearily, grimly. In his card-file Mr. Peabody's account was already earmarked for collection by legal measures; and it was years since he had paid attention to the "lost-your-bill" excuse.

This incident, however, dimmed Mr. Peabody's good humor only momentarily. He was going away for the weekend, without any expense beyond the gasoline that his car would consume on the drive, and the bottle of whiskey which he was bringing to his host.

Mr. Peabody found his greatest satisfactions as a weekend guest among comparative strangers. On such occasions he was generally regarded as an enviable person. In the first place, he was writing, or about to write, a play. Then, because he was single, and physically unobjectionable, he was suspected of being a devil with women — an insinuation that he loved to deny, laughingly. Again, he conveyed an impression of means; he lived in Manhattan, drove a car, looked well in a dinner jacket, had conventional manner, and smiled a little when other men spoke about money. Consequently, he enjoyed a certain popularity.

He drove his car to his apartment house, and brought down his suitcase, which the house doorman installed in the rumble-seat of the car. As usual when he wanted to give a tip, Mr. Peabody found that he had no coin smaller than a quarter in his pocket. The doorman was waiting expectantly. Reluctantly, Mr. Peabody handed him a quarter, and was rewarded with a flattering grin. "Thank *you*, sir," said the doorman.

"If anybody asks for me, Herbert," said Mr. Peabody, "say that I'll not be back till Monday." But he did not expect anyone to ask for him.

"Yes, *sir*," said the doorman, and tipped his cap.

On his journey northward, Mr. Peabody avoided the crowded thoroughfares, and wound his way through the quieter residential sections of the city. His driving was expertly mechanical, and his mind was engaged on a few lines that he might use with good effect during the weekend, when a little girl darted into the street, directly in the path of his car. He had no time to stop or turn; there was an impact, and her body hurtled through the air, and fell against the curb a dozen feet away, in an unpleasant attitude.

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For one horror-struck instant Mr. Peabody applied his brakes, and saw that the child was dead. Then he sped away, as fast as he could. Far behind him he heard a woman scream.

Mr. Peabody's mind was at first a confusion of little impulses, darting like water-bugs on the surface of his fear. Later he began to think a little.

Detached and formulated, his thoughts in this first stage were:

It wasn't his fault. The girl had run in front of his car.

He carried no insurance. It would be manslaughter. He would be put in jail.

Witnesses might testify it wasn't his fault. He had seen no one on the street. The woman who had screamed might have been the mother.

Witnesses might have taken down his license number. Hadn't he seen a couple of men on the street? They would turn in his license number.

He ought to go back. They would say he was a hit-and-run driver. They would ruin him.

Automobile drivers had no chance against pedestrians. The only thing to do was run away. Unless you were rich. The rich could get out of anything. . . .

Several miles farther on, the sight of a police car coming toward him brought Mr. Peabody sharply back to consciousness. So soon? The car passed him unconcernedly, and Mr. Peabody's thoughts entered their second stage.

The bumper. Suppose there was blood or something. He stopped the car, got out, and looked. Nothing. Not even a spot. He pretended to be examining his tires.

What if they had the license number? Run away. Europe. That took money. Everything took money. Drive west. Take a chance.

All Mr. Peabody's instincts opposed this solution. He had no wish to become a fugitive from justice, no confidence in his ability to defy society single-handed.

Suppose, he preferred to think, they didn't have the license number? Only a description of the car. They'd send out the description to all garages.

He was driving north. They'd notify the suburban police.

Abruptly, Mr. Peabody turned the car eastward.

They might broadcast the description over the radio. Maybe they'd hear it up at the McPhersons. Better call off the weekend. Couldn't stand it now, anyway.

What about the car? He couldn't get rid of it. He couldn't keep driving it around.

Leave it somewhere? Where?

Why not in front of the house? With all the others? Most obvious place the safest. Like that story by Poe . . .

Mr. Peabody drove south, and in a short time reached his apartment house, where he sandwiched his car in between two others. The doorman was surprised to see him.

Feeling the need of explanation, "I just remembered I've got an appoint-

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ment, Herbert," said Mr. Peabody, lamely, "I won't be able to go away after all."

"Okay, Mister Peabody," the doorman said.

When Mr. Peabody got out of the car he found that his whole body was trembling. The doorman was looking at him, so he forced a smile, and pretended to tie his shoelace. As he stooped, he said, "Get my bag out of the car, will you, Herbert?"

Herbert brought out the bag, and carried it into the house. Mr. Peabody followed him, feeling curiously unalive. At the elevator he reached into his pocket mechanically and gave Herbert another quarter. "Thank *you*, sir," crowed Herbert.

The elevator boy took Mr. Peabody to the ninth floor, and carried his bag into his apartment for him.

Alone, Mr. Peabody fell onto his bed, and buried his face in a pillow; his thoughts entered a third stage.

He'd killed a girl. A little girl. Think of the way her mother must be feeling.

Mr. Peabody descended into bathos.

Then he took a big, cosmic view. What happened to the little girl, or her mother, or himself didn't matter in the long run. Just ants, really.

And after all, it wasn't his fault if the little girl had got herself run over.

His fears began to subside. The chances were, he reflected, that they wouldn't catch him. There were thousands of cars like his in the city. He wished he hadn't insisted on having the special green model. But there were a lot of the green ones, too.

And it was very hard to read a license number when a car was moving away from you.

He rose and washed his face and felt better. He would put the thing out of his mind. He braced his shoulders, picked up a popular magazine, and looked at a story.

He was pleased. There was nothing like being sensible. Facing facts. The thing was too bad but it couldn't be helped. He lit a pipe.

The house telephone rang, and he almost screamed with fright. After an instant in which he fought for composure, he answered.

The voice of Herbert the doorman, whined, "Mr. Peabody, there are two men down here fooling around your car. I told them to leave it alone but they said for me to go away."

Mr. Peabody was very calm: He said, "Thank you, Herbert. I'll attend to it."

The windows of his living room faced a court, but his bathroom window looked out on the street. By craning, he could see his car at the curb. A man was standing in front of it with a small black book. Another man had his foot on the back bumper. They were big men, with gray hats.

Mr. Peabody drew in his head, and felt sick. So they had the license number after all. They'd say he was a hit-and-run driver. They wouldn't have any mercy. They'd put him away for twenty years. He'd be ruined. The detectives would probably beat him with a rubber hose. The newspapers

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would call him a fiend. Better commit suicide than face life now.

What he really wanted was to get the benefits of suicide without dying.

Not jump out of the window. Lord, no. And there was no gas in the apartment.

He had read, somewhere, of the way Romans did it. Got in a warm tub and slit the veins in their wrists. They said it wasn't painful that way. He shuddered.

It occurred to him that if he waited until the detectives came up, the fact that he had tried to commit suicide would make everybody see that he took the accident to heart, that he wasn't the usual hit-and-run driver.

All this went through Mr. Peabody's mind in a few seconds of panic. He turned on the water in the tub.

He hesitated for a moment, wondering whether to take off his clothes. But there was no use, after all, in spoiling his suit.

The house phone rang again. Taking a deep breath, he answered it.

"Mr. Peabody," said Herbert, agitatedly. "Them two men just took off in your car. I tried to stop them but they had a key, Mr. Peabody. The man said for you to get in touch with the finance company. It wasn't my fault, Mr. Peabody."

Mr. Peabody put up the telephone. For a moment he was very grave. Then suddenly he laughed hysterically.

The finance company! Of course! They had the right to repossess your car if they found it on the street.

Mr. Peabody looked with astonished eyes at the bath-tub. That just went to show you how crazy a man could be.

His fears dissipated like mist. If they'd had the license number they'd have got him by now. And the car would be in the company garage, where nobody would ever look for it.

He wanted to sing. He wanted to dance. He wanted to get out in the open air. Forget about the whole thing.

He had an idea. The McPhersons. He'd telephone that his car was being repaired but he'd take the next train. . . .

Putting on his clothes, Mr. Peabody whistled for a little while.

Fifteen minutes later, as Mr. Peabody was leaving his apartment house, a hand touched his arm, and someone spoke his name. His heart almost stopped. The plain clothesman at his side knew his age, his place of employment, the color of his eyes and hair, his weight, his state of insolvency — and his automobile license number.

Mr. Peabody felt as if he had been run over.

Watch EQ on TV

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LETTER OF THE LAW

by SELWYN JEPSON

MY DEAR MRS. BROWNE: MY TELegram must have been a terrible shock to you, but I dared not let you open your paper tomorrow unprepared and see the story of her dreadful death in bald print. You loved her as much as I did. You were her sister, and I her only companion these seventeen years. In spite of all the people who looked to her for everything, we were the only two who were really in her life and in her devoted heart.

If my writing is more difficult than ever, forgive me. So much happened at once and I am still terribly shaky. But I *had* to write to you as soon as I could pull myself together. You can help me, if you will, by telling me that I did right. Please, if you are not alone, take this letter to your room and lock the door. And of course you will destroy it as soon as you have read it.

It was very difficult up to the moment of decision, but once I was past it, things went fairly easily, and I can still think clearly. I will do my best to write clearly.

How quiet it is! Never to hear her voice again — oh, Mary! Mary! I remember when my mother died, and then my father, but it was never as bad as this. Being without home or money, and everyone I had called friend turning their backs on me because I was poor and miserable, she gave me both home and friendship. "Agatha, you shall live with me, and be my companion." I can hear the words as if it were yesterday. It was wonderful! A room of my own again, clothes, money in my pocket. Seventeen years of absolute happiness. If we ever disagreed it was never for more than a few minutes. It was generally that she became impatient with me when I tried to make her see that someone was imposing on her, taking advantage of her generosity. And they did, so often. In her purity of heart she could not understand an evil motive in anyone.

She even thought Mr. Jarvis was an honest man. She could not see that with his round pink face, his blue eyes which never left yours, his soft, quick voice, and his habit of repeating everything at least twice — she could not see that he was a villain. Poor darling, she looked at his black jacket, striped trousers, and the pearl pin in his black satin tie, and said she had never seen anyone so obviously respectable. Also, because he lived in the flat upstairs, he was a neighbor, and in her philosophy that was enough to make him completely safe and acceptable. In no time she was calling him "my man of business," and thought it so clever of him to be able to conduct his intricate affairs in the city from his own fireside with no more equipment than a brief case

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full of papers and a telephone. I think it was that brief case as much as anything which made me distrust him. It was of the finest pigskin and had two gold locks with his initials in gold between them. It looked *too* rich, if you see what I mean.

But Mary would not listen. He used to come to tea and sit on the edge of his chair with one of my chocolate cakes in his little fat fingers and tell us how he had made three thousand pounds in half an hour that very day. "It's not really difficult, my dear ladies, not really difficult at all. Judgment, judgment, purely a matter of judgment. Yes, purely —"

And within a month Mary had taken her affairs away from Spottiswoode & Evans, and Mr. Jarvis was here to lunch as well as tea at least three times a week. He positively wore out the elevator between the third and fourth floors. Of course, I did not labor the point about not trusting him, directly I realized how much it upset her. Besides, he showed her figures on pieces of stiff blue paper, ruled this way and that in columns which proved how greatly he had improved her position. "Twenty percent richer than you were a week ago, my dear lady, twenty percent. Think of that, think of that!" I had to buy half a dozen bottles of port because he liked a glass after lunch. And a box of cigars. Havanas. You can guess what *they* cost. After lunch there would be a ceremonious signing of papers out of that hateful brief case, and Mary would feel wonderful and important, like a big business woman. The washing-up took me simply ages. He ate such a lot. Greed was his middle name. Only greed could make a man want to rob an old woman of everything she possessed. For that is what he did. It took him six weeks. He showed us how he did it. Absolutely legally. He explained all about the crash of the Arlo Trust, and it was in the papers just as he told us. And on those documents, on the share certificates which was all that was left of Mary's little fortune, was the name of the Arlo Trust, in fine engraved lettering at the top of each, with all the squirlygigs in the world to make it look trustworthy.

Mr. Jarvis did not come to lunch, nor to tea, last week. Nor did he look in even once to see how Mary was feeling — after the appalling shock of discovering that she was penniless, that the allowances to Letty and the Cawfield family must cease, that she could not pay Eileen's fare to Persia to join Roger, that if she spent any of the money in her current account there would not be enough for next quarter's rent, that apart from the furniture of this flat and a few small pieces of jewelery and the Spode dogs, she had nothing in the world.

She did not speak for hours at a time. She scarcely looked at me — perhaps because she could not bear the pity in my eyes, although the Lord knows I did my best not to show it. Not once did I say, I told you so. I did not even feel it. The

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thing was too big, too awful. She only made one reference to it after that terrible hour of Mr. Jarvis' last visit. "It isn't for me," she said. "It's on your account, and all the others — those who relied on me. I've let you all down. It wasn't just a mistake. It was vanity." I ran out, down the stairs, not waiting for the elevator, and into the street — because of the tears I couldn't control.

So now, about today. I will keep strictly to the facts. No emotion. I feel all cold inside now, and this pen, these words, seem to belong to someone else.

I went out at a few minutes past ten. I went straight to the post office and drew out three pounds — I have still fifty-two left, so I shall be all right until I can find some sort of job. I did the shopping. I bought a small chicken — a great extravagance, but I hoped to tempt Mary who had not eaten more than a thimbleful of anything for three days — things for a salad, and the bacon ration, and got back to the flat at eleven, almost to the minute. I took my bag into the kitchen and prepared Mary's tray of cold milk and biscuits, which I knew she would take and so get some nourishment into her. She was not in the sitting room and the door of the drawing room was closed — usually we leave it open so that in this hot weather there is a current of air from the windows overlooking the garden. I thought it a little odd that she should have shut herself in the drawing room, but decided she might be lying down on the sofa, even asleep, for when you are sleeping badly — and she had been sleeping scarcely at all — you are apt to feel sleepy and *can* sleep at odd moments. So I opened the drawing-room door very quietly, and saw that I had been right about her being on the sofa. The poor sweet, I thought, so she *is* resting. I was right. But it was her last rest. I saw the little pistol of which I had always been so frightened, glittering on the Bokhara rug just by her right hand, which was hanging down, and the world came to an end for me in a timeless moment of agony. I do not know why I did not drop the tray or scream or faint or do something more dramatic than just standing there like a thing of stone. My hands began to shake, and the glass of milk to jitter and spill, when I moved a few paces farther into the room to make sure — although even as I did so, I knew there was no need.

I backed away and next found myself in the kitchen with the tray still in my hands. I put the tray down by the sink. I seemed able to think directly my hands were free. I sat in the chair for several minutes, thinking faster and faster, and seeing things so clearly that now when I look back on it after a few hours, I ask myself, was it I? Was it Agatha Tomlin who thought like that, who acted as I acted during the next half-hour or so? It was as though I was the instrument, indeed the willing helper, of someone else in me — someone

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who had taken complete possession of me. I forgot that by nature I am timid, nervous, uncertain, inclined to need a stronger spirit to lean on. Perhaps it was because that stronger spirit had been taken from me so suddenly that some hidden strength of my own came briefly to my aid — briefly, but it lasted just long enough.

I poured the milk back into the bottle and returned it to the refrigerator. I put the biscuits in the tin, rinsed the spilt milk off the plate, dried it, and put it in the rack. It took a great effort to face the drawing room again, but I managed it. I kissed Mary goodbye — her cheek was still warm and it was difficult to believe that no breath moved between her lips. Apart from that, I did not touch her, difficult as it was not to wipe the blood away from the cruel wound in her temple. I picked up the pistol by the thin end and carried it to the sitting room, closing the door. Before I put it back in its place in the table drawer, I rubbed it hard all over with my handkerchief.

Then I dialed Mr. Jarvis' number and as soon as I heard his voice, said quickly, "Good morning, Mr. Jarvis. Do you think you could spare a moment to come down? I think Mary would like to see you."

He did not let me get any further, but began at once to say that he was sorry, that he was extremely busy, and would I mind hanging up as he was expecting an important call from the city. "But I am sure you can help her —" I began again.

"I've explained the whole lamentable situation several times to her, several times — it can serve no good purpose to do so again. Tell her I'm very sorry, very sorry!" And he rang off.

I sat for a moment and then tried again, but he no sooner heard my voice than he cut me off without a word.

At the same moment the front doorbell rang and very nearly stopped my heart. I had no idea who it could be, and I was in two minds whether to answer it. Then I realized that I would have to. Luckily it turned out all right, except that it was very distressing to see Eileen's tear-stained face and hear her broken-hearted disappointment about not being able to go out to Persia. Mary must have written to her yesterday, telling her about there being no money, and she had hurried up from Farnham directly she got the letter.

"But, Agatha, what's *happened?*" She waved the letter at me. "How can Aunt have lost it all?"

I told her that Mary had had very bad advice about her investments. Of course, she wanted to know all about it, to see her Aunt and perhaps persuade her to let her have something, even a little, towards her fare. I said Mary was resting, that she was still terrible upset, that I dared not let her talk about it any more. And then I added that she was saving herself for an interview with the man who had advised her so badly. "What she should do," Eileen said, in that

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fierce way of hers, "is go straight to the police. I'm sure she's been swindled." And I said that that was exactly what I thought, and it might indeed become a police matter. "Then there's *some* hope," Eileen brightened a little, and then, to my relief, said she would leave it to me to see what could be done.

I waited until I heard the elevator going down with her, and then making sure I had my key for getting in again, went up the stairs to the next floor. No one was about, and no one saw me at Mr. Jarvis' door.

As soon as he opened it I stepped onto the mat and said, "Please, please, Mr. Jarvis, you must see her! She needs you!"

"I can do nothing, nothing! This is outrageous! You're interrupting me at a vital moment. I was deeply involved myself in this disastrous business, and I must recoup, must recoup." And he tried to shut the door, but I was still half-inside.

"Oh, well," I said quickly, "if you won't help her, you won't, but who is there to advise her if you don't? That bank manager of hers is no use at all. And the legacy is so much bigger than she ever thought it would be."

"Bank managers are very good fellows, good fellows, they —" He pulled himself up, coughed, and went on, "Yes, indeed, they are — but very conservative, very. Legacy did you say?" His little round eyes went all about me, as if he dared not let me see into them.

"I thought," I said, "that Mary mentioned it to you. Her brother died last May."

"I seem to remember she said something about a recent bereavement, but — er — how much larger — I mean — if there's any sizable sum — possibilities, you know — yes, possibilities —"

"No, never mind," I said, and stepped back into the corridor. "I shouldn't have interfered. After all, it's no business of mine. You're busy. I don't want to be responsible —"

I turned and went towards the stairs, managing somehow not to look back. I reached the flat and closed the door, listening, waiting, praying. Then at last I heard him on the other side, his snuffling, Pekinesey breathing, as he prepared himself, rehearsed his expression. After several seconds the bell rang. I did not open the door too quickly. When I did, I looked surprised. "Oh, you shouldn't have come. You'll miss that telephone call."

"When a friend is in need," he said smoothly, "I'm not the man to think of myself — no, not the man. It was selfish of me even to hesitate. Where's the dear lady?" He peered past me.

"Lying down," I said, letting him in and allowing him to follow me into the sitting room. "She's in the drawing room."

He looked across at the closed door, his mouth moist and the blue eyes naked. I thought of a wasp — how its head will go on eating when its body has been severed.

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I stood the other side of the table from him. "Sit down, Mr. Jarvis. There's just one thing I must ask you before you see her."

"Of course, dear lady." He sat down and fished out a cigar to cover his impatience and began to prepare it for lighting.

"You were on the Board of the Arlo Trust, weren't you?"

"Yes, indeed. But I resigned three months ago. Too many other interests. I think I explained. A great pity. If I'd been there today — ah — well!"

"I'm a foolish old woman, Mr. Jarvis, and know nothing of these things, but Mary was puzzled about why all the shares had to be in your name instead of hers."

He looked suddenly doubtful, as though he had met a stone among the cake currants.

"I explained that too, to everybody's satisfaction I should have thought, everybody's. How could I act quickly, with decision, at a second's notice, if I had to come running down each time for a signature?"

I pulled open the table-drawer, with the pistol lying there, and looked down at it.

"It's a pity you didn't act quickly, before the shares fell from eighteen shillings to ninepence in one morning," I said. "But perhaps you did — *the day before!*"

"That's a very libelous statement," he said, and I knew immediately that it was true. "Let me tell you," he went on, "that anyone can make an error of judgment. The best of us, and I'm only human. But this has been gone over before. Your mistress fully understood."

"My mistress — yes. And my only friend," I heard myself say. I was still looking into the drawer.

"If I'm to see her," he began briskly, "it must be now. You say she wishes to discuss the problems of this legacy, the possibility, no doubt, that we might recoup our fortunes together, eh? Recoup — *What's that you've got there?*"

He had obeyed an instinctive curiosity to move closer to see what it was I was looking at. "If anyone harmed her," I said slowly, "I think I would kill him."

He did the only possible thing he could do. He grabbed the pistol from the drawer.

"It's loaded," I said. "It's been there all the time I've lived here."

"I daresay it has. And I daresay it's a souvenir from two wars ago and there isn't a license for it. All the same, I think it would be safer with me." He put it in his pocket with a masterful air.

"Forgive me," I said. "It's only that I love her so."

"If you love her so," he said nastily, "you'll take me to her and stop wasting my time."

"Yes," I said. "I'll take you to her."

I opened the drawing-room door and he went in with his face fixed in that open, friendly, confidence-inspiring expression which was supposed to disguise the greed with which his soul was so rotten.

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The moment he was inside the drawing room I shut the door and turned the key in the lock. I picked up the cigar from where he had left it in an ashtray, on the sitting-room table, and threw it out of the window on my way to the telephone. I heard him cry out in horror and alarm as I put my finger in the hole marked 9 on the dial, and I had swung it three times before he reached the door and tried the knob. "Emergency," said a cool efficient voice. "Police!" I said. "Someone has been shot!"

I gave the address quickly. They took it down. I did not say it was murder. They would decide that for themselves when they came. I put down the receiver. Mr. Jarvis was shouting to me from inside the drawing room to unlock the door. I sat quite still until I remembered that someone would have to open the front door for the police; so I opened the front door and leaned against the wall outside, rather than go back into the sitting room and hear that frenzied man beating on the inside of the drawing-room door. It was just as well, because one of the bullets he fired into the lock in an attempt to break it might easily have hit me. I had a wicked feeling of triumph when he shot at the lock, because I knew it would settle the question of finger-prints on the pistol — they would be in the right places, wouldn't they?

The police came and took him away. They said I had shown great presence of mind in locking the door on the murderer and dialing 999, and that I shall have to be a witness. When they asked me why he had done it, I said I didn't know, but I thought Mary had had a notion to go to the police about some business matter he did not want investigated. "Ah," they said. "Well, it'll be investigated now, all right."

And so there it is, Mrs. Browne. That is what happened, and I am sure you will agree with me that it was the right thing for me to have done. I don't say your sister would altogether have approved, but it was a moment — the last and only time — when someone could take responsibility without consulting her. God rest her beloved soul. And Mr. Jarvis', I suppose.

Yours sincerely,

AGATHA TOMLIN

"Q"

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On October 16, 1951, The Grolier Club of New York opened its "Exhibit of The Important Books in English." The exhibit covered the first half of Twentieth Century literature and consisted of 118 books, of which 67 were written by American authors. In the group representing "The Fourth Decade" there were 22 selections, including novels, poetry, history, and essays, and of these 22 authors no less than eight — a remarkably high percentage in such a definitive quality-listing — have contributed to EQMM. The eight authors are Stephen Vincent Benét, Elizabeth Bowen, Walter D. Edmonds, William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, J. B. Priestley, John Steinbeck, and Evelyn Waugh.

It is interesting to note that three of the books chosen to represent "The Second Decade" are detective stories — E. C. Bentley's TRENT'S LAST CASE, *John Buchan's* THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS, *and G. K. Chesterton's* THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY.

Now, to celebrate The Grolier Club's nominations, we bring you a story by John Steinbeck — a tender, heart-warming story from that wonderfully gay and wonderfully sad book, TORTILLA FLAT.

THE POOR PIRATE

by JOHN STEINBECK

A GREAT MANY PEOPLE SAW THE Pirate every day, and some laughed at him, and some pitied him; but no one knew him very well, and no one interfered with him. He was a huge, broad man, with a tremendous black and bushy beard. He wore jeans and a blue shirt, and he had no hat. In town he wore shoes. There was a shrinking in the Pirate's eyes when he confronted any grown person, the secret look of an animal that would like to run away if it dared turn its back long enough. Because of this expression, the paisanos of Monterey knew that his head had not grown up with the rest of his body. They called him the Pirate because of his beard. Every day people saw him wheeling his barrow of pitchwood about the streets until he sold the load. And always in a cluster at his heels walked his five dogs.

Enrique was rather houndish in appearance, although his tail was bushy. Pajarito was brown and curly, and these were the only two things you could see about him. Rudolph was a

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dog of whom passers-by said, "He is an American dog." Fluff was a Pug and Señor Alec Thompson seemed to be a kind of Airedale. They walked in a squad behind the Pirate, very respectful toward him, and very solicitous for his happiness. When he sat down to rest from wheeling his barrow, they all tried to sit in his lap and have their ears scratched.

Some people had seen the Pirate early in the morning on Alvarado Street; some had seen him cutting pitchwood; some knew he sold kindling; but no one except Pilon knew everything the Pirate did. Pilon knew everybody and everything about everybody.

The Pirate lived in a deserted chicken house in the yard of a deserted house on Tortilla Flat. He would have thought it presumptuous to live in the house itself. The dogs lived around and on top of him, and the Pirate liked this, for his dogs kept him warm on the coldest nights. If his feet were cold, he had only to put them against the warm belly of Señor Alec Thompson. The chicken house was so low that the Pirate had to crawl in on his hands and knees.

Early every morning, well before daylight, the Pirate crawled out of his chicken house, and the dogs followed him, roughing their coats and sneezing in the cold air. Then the party went down to Monterey and worked along an alley. Four or five restaurants had their back doors on this alley. The Pirate entered each one, into a restaurant kitchen, warm and smelling of food. Grumbling cooks put packages of scraps in his hands at each place. They didn't know why they did it.

When the Pirate had visited each back door and had his arms full of parcels, he walked back up the hill to Monroe Street and entered a vacant lot, and the dogs excitedly swarmed about him. Then he opened the parcels and fed the dogs. For himself he took bread or a piece of meat out of each package, but he did not pick the best for himself. The dogs sat down about him, licking their lips nervously, and shifting their feet while they waited for food. They never fought over it, and that was a surprising thing. The Pirate's dogs never fought each other, but they fought everything else that wandered the streets of Monterey on four legs. It was a fine thing to see the pack of five, hunting fox-terriers and Pomeranians like rabbits.

Daylight had come by the time the meal was over. The Pirate sat on the ground and watched the sky turn blue with the morning. Below him he saw the schooners put out to sea with deckloads of lumber. He heard the bell buoy ringing sweetly off China Point. The dogs sat about him and gnawed at the bones. The Pirate seemed to be listening to the day rather than seeing it, for while his eyes did not move about, there was an air of attentiveness in him. His big hands strayed to the dogs and his fingers worked soothingly in the coarse hair. After about half an hour,

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the Pirate went to the corner of the vacant lot, threw the covering of sacks from his wheelbarrow, and dug up his ax out of the ground where he buried it every evening. Then up the hill he pushed the barrow, and into the woods, until he found a dead tree, full of pitch. By noon he had a load of fine kindling; and then, still followed by his dogs, he walked the streets until he had sold the load for twenty-five cents.

It was possible to observe all this, but what he did with the quarter, no one could tell. He never spent it. In the night, guarded from danger by his dogs, he went into the woods and hid the day's quarter with hundreds of others. Somewhere he had a great hoard of money.

Pilon, that acute man, from whom no details of the life of his fellows escaped, and who was doubly delighted to come upon those secrets that nestled deep in the brains of his acquaintances, discovered the Pirate's hoard by a logical process. Pilon reasoned thus: "Every day that Pirate has a quarter. If it is two dimes and a nickel, he takes it to a store and gets a twenty-five cent piece. He never spends any money at all. Therefore, he must be hiding it."

Pilon tried to compute the amount of the treasure. For years the Pirate had been living in this way. Six days a week he cut pitchwood, and on Sundays he went to church. His clothes he got from the back doors of houses, his food at the back doors of restaurants. Pilon puzzled with the great numbers for a while, and then gave it up. "The Pirate must have at least a hundred dollars," he thought.

For a long time Pilon had considered these things. But it was only after the foolish and enthusiastic promise to feed Danny that the thought of the Pirate's hoard gained any personal significance to Pilon.

Before he approached the subject at all, Pilon put his mind through a long and stunning preparation. He felt very sorry for the Pirate. "Poor little half-formed one," he said to himself. "God did not give him all the brain he should have. That poor little Pirate cannot look after himself. For see, he lives in filth in an old chicken house. He feeds upon scraps fit only for his dogs. His clothes are thin and ragged. And because his brain is not a good one, he hides his money."

Now, with his groundwork of pity laid, Pilon moved on to his solution. "Would it not be a thing of merit," he thought, "to do those things for him which he cannot do for himself? To buy him warm clothes, to feed him food fit for a human? But," he reminded himself, "I have no money to do these things, although they lie squirming in my heart. How can these charitable things be accomplished?"

Now he was getting somewhere. Like the cat, which during a long hour closes in on a sparrow, Pilon was ready for his pounce. "I have it!" his brain cried. "It is like this: The Pirate has money, but he has not the brain to use it. I have the brain! I

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will offer my brain to his use. I will give freely of my mind. That shall be my charity toward this poor little half-made man."

It was one of the finest structures Pilon had ever built. The urge of the artist to show his work to an audience came upon him. "I will tell it to Pablo," he thought. But he wondered whether he would dare do such a thing. Was Pablo strictly honest? Would he not want to divert some of this money to his own ends? Pilon decided not to take the chance, right then, anyway.

It is astounding to find that the belly of every black and evil thing is as white as snow. And it is saddening to discover how the concealed parts of angels are leprous. Honor and peace to Pilon, for he had discovered how to uncover and to disclose to the world the good that lay in every evil thing. Nor was he blind, as so many saints are, to the evil of good things. It must be admitted with sadness that Pilon had neither the stupidity, the self-righteousness nor the greediness for reward ever to become a saint. Enough for Pilon to do good and to be rewarded by the glow of human brotherhood accomplished.

That very night he paid a visit to the chicken house where the Pirate lived with his dogs. Danny, Pablo, and Jesus Maria, sitting by the stove, saw him go and said nothing. For, they thought delicately, either a vapor of love had been wafted to Pilon or else he knew where he could get a little wine. In either case, it was none of their business until he told them about it.

It was well after dark, but Pilon had a candle in his pocket, for it might be a good thing to watch the expression on the Pirate's face while he talked. And Pilon had a big round sugar cookie in a bag, that Susie Francisco, who worked in a bakery, had given him in return for a formula for getting the love of Charlie Guzman. Charlie was a Postal Telegraph messenger and rode a motorcycle; and Susie had a man's cap to put on backward in case Charlie should ever ask her to ride with him. Pilon thought the Pirate might like the sugar cookie.

The night was very dark. Pilon picked his way along a narrow street bordered with vacant lots and with weed-grown, neglected gardens.

Galvez' bad bulldog came snarling out of Galvez' yard, and Pilon spoke soothing compliments to him. "Nice dog," he said gently, and "Pretty dog," both of them palpable lies. They impressed the bulldog, however, for he retired into Galvez' yard.

Pilon came at last to the vacant property where the Pirate lived. And now he knew he must be careful, for the Pirate's dogs, if they suspected ill of anyone toward their master, were known to become defending furies. As Pilon stepped into the yard, he heard deep and threatening growls from the chicken house.

"Pirate," he called. "It is thy good friend Pilon, come to talk with thee."

There was silence. The dogs stopped growling.

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"Pirate, it is only Pilon."

A deep surly voice answered him, "Go away. I am sleeping now. The dogs are sleeping. It is dark, Pilon. Go to bed."

"I have a candle in my pocket," Pilon called. "It will make a light as bright as day in thy dark house. I have a big sugar cookie for thee, too."

A faint scuffling sounded in the chicken house. "Come then," the Pirate said. "I will tell the dogs it is all right."

As he advanced through the weeds, Pilon could hear the Pirate talking softly to his dogs, explaining to them that it was only Pilon, who would do no harm. Pilon bent over in front of the dark doorway and scratched a match and lighted his candle.

The Pirate was seated on the dirt floor, and his dogs were all about him. Enrique growled, and had to be reassured again. "That one is not so wise as the others," the Pirate said pleasantly. His eyes were the pleased eyes of an amused child. When he smiled his big white teeth glistened in the candlelight.

Pilon held out the bag. "It is a fine cake for you," he said.

The Pirate took the bag and looked into it; then he smiled delightedly, and brought out the cookie. The dogs all grinned and faced him, and moved their feet and licked their lips. The Pirate broke his cookie into seven pieces. The first he gave to Pilon, who was his guest. "Now Enrique," he said. "Now Fluff. Now Señor Alec Thompson." Each dog received his piece and gulped it and looked for more. Last, the Pirate ate his and held up his hands to the dogs. "No more, you see," he told them. Immediately the dogs lay down about him.

Pilon sat on the floor and stood the candle on the ground in front of him. The Pirate questioned him self-consciously with his eyes. Pilon sat silently, to let many questions pass through the Pirate's head. At length he said, "Thou art a worry to thy friends."

The Pirate's eyes filled with astonishment. "I? To my friends? What friends?"

Pilon softened his voice. "Thou hast many friends who think of thee. They do not come to see thee because thou art proud. They think it might hurt thy pride to have them see thee living in this chicken house, clothed in rags, eating garbage with thy dogs. But these friends of thine worry for fear the bad life may make thee ill."

The Pirate was following his words with breathless astonishment, and his brain tried to realize these new things he was hearing. It did not occur to him to doubt them, since Pilon was saying them. "I have all these friends?" he said in wonder. "And I did not know it. And I am a worry to those friends. I did not know, Pilon. I would not have worried them if I had known." He swallowed to clear his throat of emotion. "You see, Pilon, the dogs like it here. And I like it because of them. I did not think I was a worry to my friends."

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Tears came into the Pirate's eyes.

"Nevertheless," Pilon said, "thy mode of living keeps all thy friends uneasy."

The Pirate looked down at the ground and tried to think clearly, but as always, when he attempted to cope with a problem, his brain grew gray and no help came from it, but only a feeling of helplessness. He looked to his dogs for protection, but they had gone back to sleep, for it was none of their business. And then he looked earnestly into Pilon's eyes. "You must tell me what to do, Pilon. I did not know these things."

It was too easy. Pilon was a little ashamed that it should be so easy. He hesitated; nearly gave it up; but then he knew he would be angry with himself if he did. "Thy friends are poor," he said. "They would like to help thee, but they have no money. If thou hast money hidden, bring it out into the open. Buy thyself some clothes. Eat food that is not cast out by other people. Bring thy money out of its hiding place, Pirate."

Pilon had been looking closely at the Pirate's face while he spoke. He saw the eyes droop with suspicion and then with sullenness. In a moment Pilon knew two things certainly: first, that the Pirate had money hidden; and second, that it was not going to be easy to get at it. He was pleased at the latter fact. The Pirate had become a problem in tactics such as Pilon enjoyed.

Now the Pirate was looking at him again, and in his eyes was cunning, and on top of that, a studied ingenuousness. "I have no money anywhere," he said.

"But every day, my friend, I have seen thee get a quarter for thy wood, and never have I seen thee spend it."

This time the Pirate's brain came to his rescue. "I give it to a poor old woman," he said. "I have no money anywhere." And with his tone he closed a door tightly on the subject.

So it must be guile, Pilon thought. So those gifts, that in him were so sharpened, must be called into play. He stood up and lifted his candle. "I only thought to tell thee how thy friends worry," he said critically. "If thou wilt not try to help, I can do nothing for thee."

The sweetness came back into the Pirate's eyes. "Tell them I am healthy," he begged. "Tell my friends to come and see me. I will not be too proud. I will be glad to see them any time. Wilt thou tell them for me, Pilon?"

"I will tell them," Pilon said ungraciously. "But thy friends will not be pleased when they see thou dost nothing to relieve their minds." Pilon blew out his candle and went away into the darkness. He knew that the Pirate would never tell where his hoard was. It must be found by stealth, taken by force and then all the good things given to the Pirate. It was the only way.

And so Pilon set himself to watch the Pirate. He followed him into the forest when he went to cut kindlings. He lay in wait outside the chicken

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house at night. He talked to him long and earnestly, and nothing came of it. The treasure was as far from discovery as ever. Either it lay buried in the chicken house or it was hidden deep in the forest, and was only visited at night.

The long and fruitless vigils wore out the patience of Pilon. He knew he must have help and advice. And who could better give it than those comrades, Danny, Pablo, and Jesus Maria? Who could be so stealthy, so guileful? Who could melt to kindness with more ease?

Pilon took them into his confidence; but first he prepared them, as he had prepared himself: The Pirate's poverty, his helplessness, and finally — the solution. When he came to the solution, his friends were in a philanthropic frenzy. They applauded him. Their faces shone with kindness. Pablo thought there might be well over a hundred dollars in the hoard.

When their joy had settled to a working enthusiasm, they came to plans.

"We must watch him," Pablo said.

"But I have watched him," Pilon argued. "It must be that he creeps off in the night, and then one cannot follow too close, for his dogs guard him like devils. It is not going to be so easy."

"You've used every argument?" Danny asked.

"Yes. Every one."

In the end it was Jesus Maria, that humane man, who found the way out. "It is difficult while he lives in that chicken house," he said. "But suppose he lived here, with us? Either his silence would break under our kindness, or else it would be easier to know when he goes out at night."

The friends gave a good deal of thought to this suggestion. "Sometimes the things he gets out of restaurants are nearly new," mused Pablo. "I have seen him with a steak out of which only a little was missing."

"It might be as much as two hundred dollars," said Pilon.

Danny offered an objection. "But those dogs — he would bring his dogs with him."

"They are good dogs," said Pilon. "They obey him exactly. You may draw a line around a corner and say, 'Keep thy dogs within this line.' He will tell them, and those dogs will stay."

"I saw the Pirate one morning, and he had nearly half a cake, just a little bit damp with coffee," said Pablo.

The question settled itself. The house resolved itself into a committee, and the committee visited the Pirate.

It was a crowded place, that chicken house, when they all got inside. The Pirate tried to disguise his happiness with a gruff tone.

"The weather has been bad," he said socially. And, "You wouldn't believe, maybe, that I found a tick as big as a pigeon's egg on Rudolph's neck." And he spoke disparagingly of his home, as a host should. "It is too small," he said. "It is not a fit place for one's friends to come. But it is

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warm and snug, especially for the dogs."

Then Pilon spoke. He told the Pirate that worry was killing his friends; but if he would go to live with them, then they could sleep again, with their minds at ease.

It was a very great shock to the Pirate. He looked at his hands. And he looked to his dogs for comfort, but they would not meet his glance. At last he wiped the happiness from his eyes with the back of his hand, and he wiped his hand on his big black beard.

"And the dogs?" he asked softly. "You want the dogs, too? Are you friends of the dogs?"

Pilon nodded. "Yes, the dogs, too. There will be a whole corner set aside for the dogs."

The Pirate had a great deal of pride. He was afraid he might not conduct himself well. "Go away now," he said pleadingly. "Go home now. Tomorrow I will come."

His friends knew how he felt. They crawled out of the door and left him alone.

"He will be happy with us, that one," said Jesus Maria.

"Poor little lonely man," Danny added. "If I had known, I would have asked him long ago, even if he had no treasure."

A flame of joy burned in all of them.

They settled soon into the new relationship. Danny, with a piece of blue chalk, drew a segment of a circle, enclosing a corner of the living room, and that was where the dogs must stay when they were in the house. The Pirate slept in that corner too, with the dogs.

The house was beginning to be a little crowded, with five men and five dogs; but from the first, Danny and his friends realized that their invitation to the Pirate had been inspired by that weary and anxious angel who guarded their destinies and protected them from evil.

Every morning, long before his friends were awake, the Pirate arose from his corner and, followed by his dogs, he made the rounds of the restaurants and the wharves. He was one of those for whom everyone feels a kindliness. His packages grew larger. The paisanos received his bounty and made use of it: fresh fish, half pies, untouched loaves of stale bread, meat that required only a little soda to take the green out. They began really to live.

And their acceptance of his gifts touched the Pirate more deeply than anything they could have done for him. There was a light of worship in his eyes as he watched them eat the food he brought.

In the evening, when they sat about the stove and discussed the doings of Tortilla Flat with the lazy voices of fed gods, the Pirate's eyes darted from mouth to mouth, and his own lips moved, whispering again the words his friends said. The dogs pressed in about him jealously.

These were his friends, he told himself in the night, when the house was

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dark, when the dogs snuggled close to him so that all might be warm. These men loved him so much that it worried them to have him live alone. The Pirate had often to repeat this to himself, for it was an astounding thing, an unbelievable thing. His wheelbarrow stood in Danny's yard now, and every day he cut his pitchwood and sold it. But so afraid was the Pirate that he might miss some word his friends said in the evening, might not be there to absorb some stream of the warm companionship, that he had not visited his hoard for several days to put the new coins there.

His friends were kind to him. They treated him with a sweet courtesy; but always there was some eye open and upon him. When he wheeled his barrow into the woods, one of the friends walked with him, and sat on a log while he worked. When he went into the gulch, the last thing at night, Danny or Pablo or Pilon or Jesus Maria kept him company. And in the night he must have been very quiet to have crept out without a shadow behind him.

For a week the friends merely watched the Pirate. But at last the inactivity tired them. Direct action was out of the question, they knew. And so one evening the subject of the desirability of hiding one's money came up for discussion.

Pilon began it. "I had an uncle, a regular miser, and he hid his gold in the woods. And one time he went to look at it, and it was gone. Someone had found it and stolen it. He was an old man, then, and all his money was gone, and he hanged himself." Pilon noticed, with some satisfaction, the look of apprehension that came upon the Pirate's face.

Danny noticed it, too; and he continued, "The viejo, my grandfather, who owned this house, also buried money. I do not know how much, but he was reputed a rich man, so there must have been three or four hundred dollars. The viejo dug a deep hole and put his money in it, and then he covered it up, and then he strewed pine needles over the ground until he thought no one could see that anything had been done there. But when he went back, the hole was open, and the money was gone."

The Pirate's lips followed the words. A look of terror had come into his face. His fingers picked among the neck hairs of Señor Alec Thompson. The friends exchanged a glance and dropped the subject for the time being.

In the night the Pirate crept out of the house, and the dogs crept after him; and Pilon crept after all of them. The Pirate went swiftly into the forest, leaping with sure feet over logs and brush. Pilon floundered behind him. But when they had gone at least two miles, Pilon was winded, and torn by vines. He paused to rest a moment; and then he realized that all sounds ahead of him had ceased. He waited and listened and crept about, but the Pirate had disappeared.

After two hours, Pilon went back again, slowly and tiredly. There was

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the Pirate in the house, fast asleep among his dogs. The dogs lifted their heads when Pilon entered, and Pilon thought they smiled satirically at him for a moment.

A conference took place in the gulch the next morning.

"It is not possible to follow him," Pilon reported. "He vanishes. He sees in the dark. He knows every tree in the forest. We must find some other way."

"Perhaps one is not enough," Pablo suggested. "If all of us should follow him, then one might not lose track of him."

"We will talk again tonight," said Jesus Maria, "only worse. A lady I know is going to give me a little wine," he added modestly. "Maybe if the Pirate has a little wine in him, he will not disappear so easily." So it was left.

Jesus Maria's lady gave him a whole gallon of wine. What could compare with the Pirate's delight that evening when a fruit jar of wine was put into his hand, when he sat with his friends and sipped his wine and listened to the talk? Such joy had come rarely into the Pirate's life. He wished he might clasp these dear people to his breast and tell them how much he loved them. But that was not a thing he could do, for they might think he was drunk. He wished he could do some tremendous thing to show them his love.

"We spoke last night of burying money," said Pilon. "Today I remembered a cousin of mine, a clever man. If anyone in the world could hide money where it would never be found, he could do it. So he took his money and hid it. Perhaps you have seen him, that poor little one who crawls about the wharf and begs fish heads to make soup of. That is my cousin. Someone stole his buried money."

The worry came back into the Pirate's face.

Story topped story, and in each one all manner of evil dogged the footsteps of those who hid their money.

"It is better to keep one's money close, to spend some now and then, to give a little to one's friends," Danny finished.

They had been watching the Pirate narrowly, and in the middle of the worst story they had seen the worry go from his face, and a smile of relief take its place. Now he sipped his wine and his eyes glittered with joy.

The friends were in despair. All their plans had failed. They were sick at heart. After all their goodness and their charity, this had happened. The Pirate had, in some way escaped the good they had intended to confer upon him. They finished their wine and went moodily to bed.

Few things could happen in the night without Pilon's knowledge. His ears remained open while the rest of him slept. He heard the stealthy exit of the Pirate and his dogs from the house. He leaped to awaken his friends; and in a moment the four were following the Pirate in the direction of the forest. It was very dark

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when they entered the pine forest. The four friends ran into trees, tripped on berry vines; but for a long time they could hear the Pirate marching on ahead of them. They followed as far as Pilon had followed the night before, and then, suddenly, silence, and the whispering forest and the vague night wind. They combed the woods and the brush patches, but the Pirate had disappeared again.

At last, cold and disconsolate, they came together and trudged wearily back toward Monterey. The dawn came before they got back. The sun was already shining on the bay.

The Pirate walked out on the porch to greet them, and his face was happy. They passed him sullenly, and filed into the living-room. There on the table lay a large canvas bag.

The Pirate followed them in. "I lied to thee, Pilon," he said. "I told thee I had no money, for I was afraid. I did not know about my friends, then. You have told how hidden money is so often stolen, and I am afraid again. Only last night did a way out come to me. My money will be safe with my friends. No one can steal it if my friends guard it for me."

The four men stared at him in horror. "Take thy money back to the woods and hide it," Danny said savagely. "We do not want it."

"No," said the Pirate. "I would not feel safe to hide it. But I will be happy knowing my friends guard it for me. You would not believe it, but the last two nights someone followed me into the forest to steal my money."

Terrible as the blow was, Pilon, that clever man, tried to escape it. "Before this money is put into our hands, maybe you would like to take some out," he suggested smoothly.

The Pirate shook his head. "No. I cannot do that. It is promised. I have nearly a thousand two-bitses. When I have a thousand I will buy a gold candlestick for San Francisco de Assisi.

"Once I had a nice dog, and that dog was sick; and I promised a gold candlestick of one thousand days if that dog would get well. And," he spread his hands, "that dog got well."

"Is it one of these dogs?" Pilon demanded.

"No," said the Pirate. "A truck ran over him a little later."

So it was over, all hope of diverting the money. Danny and Pablo morosely lifted the heavy bag of silver quarters, took it in the other room and put it under the pillow of Danny's bed. In time they would take a certain pleasure in the knowledge that this money lay under the pillow, but now their defeat was bitter. There was nothing in the world they could do about it. Their chance had come, and it had gone.

The Pirate stood before them, and there were tears of happiness in his eyes, for he had proved his love for his friends.

"To think," he said, "all those years I lay in that chicken house, and I did not know any pleasure. But now," he added, "oh, now I am very happy."

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THE SWEET SHOT

by E. C. BENTLEY

"NO; I HAPPENED TO BE ABROAD AT the time," Philip Trent said. "I wasn't in the way of seeing the English papers, so until I came here this week I never heard anything about your mystery."

Captain Royden, a small, spare, brown-faced man, was engaged in the delicate — and forbidden — task of taking his automatic telephone instrument to pieces. He now suspended his labors and reached for the tobacco jar. The large window of his office in the Kempshill clubhouse looked down upon the eighteenth green of that delectable golf course, and his eye roved over the whin-clad slopes beyond as he called on his recollection.

"Well, if you call it a mystery," he said as he filled a pipe. "Some people do, because they like mysteries, I suppose. For instance, Colin Hunt, the man you're staying with, calls it that. Others won't have it, and say there was a perfectly natural explanation. I could tell you as much as anybody could about it, I daresay."

"As being secretary here?"

"Not only that. I was one of the two people who were in at the death, so to speak — or next door to it," Captain Royden said. He limped to the mantelshelf and took down a silver box embossed on the lid with the crest and mottoes of the Corps of Royal Engineers. "Try one of these cigarettes, Mr. Trent. If you'd like to hear the yarn, I'll give it to you. You have heard something about Arthur Freer, I suppose?"

"Hardly anything," Trent said. "I just gathered that he wasn't a very popular character."

"No," Captain Royden said with reserve. "Did they tell you he was my brother-in-law? No? Well, now, it happened about four months ago, on a Monday — let me see — yes, the second Monday in May. Freer had a habit of playing nine holes before breakfast. Barring Sundays — he was strict about Sunday — he did it most days, even in the beastliest weather, going round all alone usually, carrying his own clubs, studying every shot as if his life depended on it. That helped to make him the very good player he was. His handicap here was two, and at Undershaw he used to be scratch, I believe. Well, at a quarter to eight he'd be on the first tee, and by nine he'd be back at his house — it's only a few minutes from here. That morning he started off as usual ——"

"And at the usual time?"

"Just about. He had spent a few minutes in the clubhouse blowing up the steward about some trifle. And that was the last time he was seen alive by anybody — near enough to speak to, that is. No one else went off the first tee until a little after nine,

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when I started round with Browson — he's our local padre; I had been having breakfast with him at the Vicarage. He's got a game leg, like me, so we often play together when he can fit it in.

"We had holed out on the first green, and were walking on to the next tee, when Browson said, 'Great Scott! Look there. Something's happened.' He pointed down the fairway of the second hole; and there we could see a man lying sprawled on the turf, face down and motionless. Now, there is this point about the second hole — the first half of it is in a dip in the land, just deep enough to be out of sight from any other point on the course, unless you're standing right above it — you'll see when you go round yourself. Well, on the tee, you *are* right above it; and we saw this man lying. We ran to the spot.

"It was Freer, as I had known it must be at that hour. He was dead, lying in a disjointed sort of way no live man could have lain in. His clothing was torn to ribbons, and it was singed too. So was his hair — he used to play bareheaded — and his face and hands. His bag of clubs was lying a few yards away, and the brassie, which he had just been using, was close by the body.

"There wasn't any wound showing, and I had seen far worse things often enough, but the padre was looking sickish, so I asked him to go back to the clubhouse and send for a doctor and the police while I mounted guard. They weren't long coming, and after they had done their job the body was taken away in an ambulance. Well, that's about all I can tell you at first hand, Mr. Trent. If you are staying with Hunt, you'll have heard about the inquest and all that, probably."

Trent shook his head. "No," he said. "Colin was just beginning to tell me, after breakfast this morning, about Freer having been killed on the course in some incomprehensible way, when a man came to see him about something. So, as I was going to apply for a fortnight's use of the course, I thought I would ask you about the affair."

"All right," Captain Royden said. "I can tell you about the inquest anyhow — had to be there to speak my own little piece, about finding the body. As for what had happened to Freer, the medical evidence was rather confusing. It was agreed that he had been killed by some tremendous shock, which had jolted his whole system to pieces and dislocated several joints, but had been not quite violent enough to cause any visible wound. Apart from that, there was disagreement. Freer's own doctor, who saw the body first, declared he must have been struck by lightning. He said it was true there hadn't been a thunderstorm, but that there had been thunder about all that weekend, and that sometimes lightning did act in that way. But the police surgeon, Collins, said there would be no such displacement of the organs from a lightning stroke, even if it did ever happen that way in our climate, which

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he doubted. And he said that if it had been lightning, it would have struck the steel-headed clubs; but the clubs lay there in their bag quite undamaged. Collins thought there must have been some kind of explosion, though he couldn't suggest what kind."

Trent shook his head. "I don't suppose that impressed the court," he said. "All the same, it may have been all the honest opinion he could give." He smoked in silence a few moments, while Captain Royden attended to the troubles of his telephone instrument with a camel's-hair brush. "But surely," Trent said at length, "if there had been such an explosion as that, somebody would have heard the sound of it."

"Lots of people would have heard it," Captain Royden answered. "But there you are, you see — nobody notices the sound of explosions around here. There's the quarry on the other side of the road, and any time after 7 A.M. there's liable to be the noise of blasting."

"A dull, sickening thud?"

"Jolly sickening," Captain Royden said, "for all of us living nearby. And so that point wasn't raised. Well, Collins is a very sound man; but as you say, his evidence didn't really explain the thing, and the other fellow's did, whether it was right or wrong. Besides, the coroner and the jury had heard about a bolt from a clear sky, and the notion appealed to them. Anyhow, they brought it in death from misadventure."

"Which nobody could deny, as the song says," Trent remarked. "And was there no other evidence?"

"Yes; some. But Hunt can tell you about it as well as I can; he was there. I shall have to ask you to excuse me now," Captain Royden said. "I have an appointment in town. The steward will sign you on for a fortnight, and probably get you a game too, if you want one today."

Colin Hunt and his wife, when Trent returned to their house for luncheon, were very willing to complete the tale. The verdict, they declared, was tripe. Dr. Collins knew his job, whereas Dr. Hoyle was an old footler, and Freer's death had never been reasonably explained.

As for the other evidence, it had, they agreed, been interesting, though it didn't help at all. Freer had been seen after he had played his tee shot at the second hole, when he was walking down to the bottom of the dip towards the spot where he met his death.

"But according to Royden," Trent said, "that was a place where he couldn't be seen, unless one was right above him."

"Well, this witness *was* right above him," Hunt rejoined. "About one thousand feet above him, so he said. He was an R.A.F. man, piloting a bomber from Bexford Camp, not far from here. He was up doing some sort of exercise, and passed over the course just at that time. He didn't know Freer, but he spotted a man

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walking down from the second tee, because he was the only living soul visible on the course. Gossett, the second man in the plane, is a temporary member here, and he did know Freer quite well — or as well as anybody cared to know him — but he never saw him. However, the pilot was quite clear that he saw a man just at the time in question, and they took his evidence so as to prove that Freer was absolutely alone just before his death. The only other person who saw Freer was another man who knew him well; used to be a caddy here, and then got a job at the quarry. He was at work on the hillside, and he watched Freer play the first hole and go on to the second — nobody with him, of course."

"Well, that was pretty well established then," Trent remarked. "He was about as alone as he could be, it seems. Yet something happened somehow."

Mrs. Hunt sniffed skeptically, and lighted a cigarette. "Yes, it did," she said. "However, I didn't worry much about it, for one. Edith — Mrs. Freer, that is: Royden's sister — must have had a terrible life of it with a man like that. Not that she ever said anything — she wouldn't. She is not that sort."

"She is a jolly good sort, anyhow," Hunt declared.

"Yes, she is; too good for most men. I can tell you," Mrs. Hunt added for the benefit of Trent, "if Colin ever took to cursing me and knocking me about, my well-known loyalty wouldn't stand the strain for very long."

"That's why I don't do it. It's the fear of exposure that makes me the perfect husband, Phil. She would tie a can to me before I knew what was happening. As for Edith, it's true she never said anything, but the change in her since it happened tells the story well enough. Since she's been living with her brother she has been looking far better and happier than she ever succeeded in doing while Freer was alive."

"She won't be living with him for very long, I daresay," Mrs. Hunt intimated darkly.

"No. I'd marry her myself if I had the chance," Hunt agreed cordially.

"Pooh! You wouldn't be in the first six," his wife said. "It will be Rennie, or Gossett, or possibly Sandy Butler — you'll see. But perhaps you've had enough of the local tittle-tattle, Phil. Did you fix up a game for this afternoon?"

"Yes; with the Jarman Professor of Chemistry in the University of Cambridge," Trent said. "He looked at me as if he thought a bath of vitriol would do me good, but he agreed to play me."

"You've got a tough job," Hunt observed. "I believe he is almost as old as he looks, but he is a devil at the short game, and he knows the course blindfold, which you don't. And he isn't so cantankerous as he pretends to be. By the way, he was the man who saw the finish of the last

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shot Freer ever played — a sweet shot if ever there was one. Get him to tell you."

"I shall try to," Trent said. "The steward told me about that, and that was why I asked the professor for a game."

Colin Hunt's prediction was fulfilled that afternoon. Professor Hyde, receiving five strokes, was one up at the seventeenth, and at the last hole sent down a four-foot putt to win the match. As they left the green he remarked, as if in answer to something Trent had that moment said, "Yes, I can tell you a curious circumstance about Freer's death."

Trent's eyes brightened; for the professor had not said a dozen words during their game, and Trent's tentative allusion to the subject after the second hole had been met merely by an intimidating grunt.

"I saw the finish of the last shot he played," the old gentleman went on, "without seeing the man himself at all. A lovely brassie it was, too — though lucky. Rolled to within two feet of the pin."

Trent considered. "I see," he said, "what you mean. You were near the second green, and the ball came over the ridge and ran down to the hole."

"Just so," Professor Hyde said. "That's how you play it — if you can. You might have done it yourself today, if your second shot had been thirty yards longer. I've never done it; but Freer often did. After a really good drive, you play a long second, blind, over the ridge; and with a perfect shot, you may get the green. Well, my house is quite near that green. I was pottering about in the garden before breakfast, and just as I happened to be looking towards the green a ball came hopping down the slope and trickled right across to the hole. Of course, I knew whose it must be — Freer always came along about that time. If it had been anyone else, I'd have waited to see him get his three, and congratulate him. As it was, I went indoors, and didn't hear of his death until long afterwards."

"And you never saw him play the shot," Trent said thoughtfully.

The professor turned a choleric blue eye on him. "How the deuce could I?" he said huffily. "I can't see through a mass of solid earth."

"I know," Trent said. "I was only trying to follow your mental process. Without seeing him play the shot, you knew it was his second — you say he would have been putting for a three. And you said, too — didn't you? — that it was a brassie shot."

"Simply because, my young friend" — the Professor was severe — "I happened to know the man's game. I had played that nine holes with him before breakfast often, until one day he lost his temper more than usual, and made himself impossible. I knew he practically always carried the ridge with his second — I won't say he always got the green — and his brassie was the only club that would do it. It is conceivable, I admit," Professor Hyde added a little stiffly, "that

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some mishap took place, and that the shot in question was not actually Freer's second; but it did not occur to me to allow for that highly speculative contingency."

On the next day, after those playing a morning round were started on their perambulation, Trent indulged himself with an hour's practice, mainly on the unsurveyed stretch of the second hole. Afterwards he had a word with the caddy-master; then visited the professional's shop, and won the regard of that expert by furnishing himself with a new mid-iron. Soon he brought up the subject of the last shot played by Arthur Freer. A dozen times that morning, he said, he had tried, after a satisfying drive, to reach the green with his second; but in vain. Fergus MacAdam shook his head. Not many, he said, could strike the ball with yon force. He could get there himself, whiles, but never for a certainty. Mr. Freer had the strength, and he kenned how to use it forbye.

What sort of clubs, Trent asked, had Freer preferred: "Lang and heavy, like himsel'. Noo ye mention it," MacAdam said, "I hae them here. They were brocht here after ahccident." He reached up to the top of a rack. "Ay, here they are. They shouldna be, of course; but naebody came to claim them."

Trent, extracting the brassie, looked thoughtfully at the heavy head with the strip of hard white material inlaid in the face. "It's a powerful club."

"Ay, for a man that could control it," MacAdam said. "I dinna care for yon ivorine face mysel'. Some fowk think it gies mair reseelience, ye ken; but there's naething in it."

"He didn't get it from you, then," Trent suggested, still closely examining the head.

"Ay, but he did. I had a lot down from Nelson's while the fashion for them was on. Ye'll find my name," MacAdam added, "stampit on the wood in the usual place, if yer een ar seein' richt."

"Well, I don't — that's just it. The stamp is quite illegible."

"Tod! Let's see," the professional said, taking the club in hand. "Guid reason for its being illegible," he went on after a brief scrutiny. "It's been obleeterated — that's easy seen. Who ever saw sic a daft-like thing! The wood has juist been crushed some gait — in a vice, I wouldna wonder. Noo, why would onybody want to dae a think like yon?"

It was twelve days later that Trent, looking in at the open door of the secretary's office, saw Captain Royden happily engaged with the separated parts of some mechanism in which coils of wire appeared to be the leading motive.

"I see you're busy," Trent said.

"Come in!" Royden said heartily. "I can do this any time — another hour's work will finish it." He laid down a pair of sharp-nosed pliers. "The electricity people have just changed us over to A.C., and I've

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got to re-wind the motor of our vacuum cleaner. Beastly nuisance," he added, looking down affectionately at the bewildering jumble of disarticulated apparatus on his table.

"You bear your sorrow like a man," Trent remarked, and Royden laughed.

"Yes," he said, "I do love tinkering about with mechanical jobs, and if I do say it myself, I'd rather do a thing like this with my own hands than risk having it faultily done by a careless workman. Too many of them about. Why, about a year ago the company sent a man here to fit a new main fuse box, and he made a short circuit with his screwdriver that knocked him right across the kitchen and might very well have killed him." He reached down his cigarette box and offered it to Trent, who helped himself, then looked down thoughtfully at the device on the lid.

"Thanks very much. When I saw this box before, I put you down for an R.E. man. *Ubique*, and *Quo fas et gloria ducunt*. Hm! I wonder why Engineers were given that motto."

"Lord knows," the captain said. "In my experience, Sappers don't exactly go where right and glory lead. The dirtiest of all the jobs and precious little glory's what they get."

"Still, they have the consolation," Trent pointed out, "of feeling that they are at home in a scientific age, and that all the rest of the Army are amateurs compared with them. That's what one of them once told me, anyhow. Well, now, Captain, I have to be off this evening. I've looked in just to say how much I've enjoyed myself here."

"Very glad you did," Captain Royden said. "You'll come again, I hope, now you know that the golf here is not so bad."

"I like it immensely. Also the members. And the secretary." Trent paused to light his cigarette. "I found the mystery rather interesting, too."

Captain Royden's eyebrows lifted slightly. "You mean about Freer's death? So you made up your mind it *was* a mystery."

"Why, yes," Trent said. "Because I made up my mind he had been killed by somebody, and probably killed intentionally. Then, when I had looked into the thing a little, I washed out the 'probably.'"

Captain Royden took up a penknife from his desk and began mechanically to sharpen a pencil. "So you don't agree with the coroner's jury?"

"No: as the verdict seems to have been meant to rule out murder or any sort of human agency, I don't. The lightning idea, which apparently satisfied them, or some of them, was not a very bright one, I thought. I was told what Dr. Collins had said against it at the inquest; and it seemed to me he had disposed of it completely when he said that Freer's clubs, most of them steel ones, were quite undamaged. A man carrying his clubs puts them down, when he plays a shot, a few feet away at most; yet Freer was supposed to have been electrocuted without any notice having been

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really taken of them, so to speak."

"Hm! No, it doesn't seem likely. I don't know that that quite decides the point, though," the captain said. "Lightning plays funny tricks, you know. I've seen a small tree struck when it was surrounded by trees twice the size. All the same, I quite agree there didn't seem to be any sense in the lightning notion."

"Just so. But when I considered what had been said about Freer's clubs, it suddenly occurred to me that nobody had said anything about *the* club, so far as my information about the inquest went. It seemed clear, from what you and the parson saw, that he had just played a shot with his brassie when he was struck down; it was lying near him, not in the bag. Besides, old Hyde actually saw the ball he had hit roll down the slope onto the green. Now, it's a good rule to study every little detail when you are on a problem of this kind. There weren't many left to study, of course, since the thing had happened four months before; but I knew Freer's clubs must be somewhere, and I thought of one or two places where they were likely to have been taken, in the circumstances, so I tried them. First, I reconnoitred the caddy-master's shed, asking if I could leave my bag there for a day or two; but I was told that the regular place to leave them was the pro.'s shop. So I went and had a chat with MacAdam, and sure enough it soon came out that Freer's bag was still in his rack. I had a look at the clubs, too."

"And did you notice anything peculiar about them?" Captain Royden asked.

"Just one little thing. But it was enough to set me thinking, and next day I drove up to London, where I paid a visit to Nelson's, the sporting outfitters. You know the firm."

Captain Royden, carefully fining down the point of his pencil, nodded. "Everybody knows Nelson's."

"Yes; and MacAdam, I knew, had an account there for his stock. I wanted to look over some clubs of a particular make — a brassie, with a slip of ivorine let into the face, such as they had supplied to MacAdam. Freer had had one of them from him."

Again Royden nodded.

"I saw the man who shows clubs at Nelson's. We had a talk, and then — you know how little things come out in the course of conversation ——"

"Especially," put in the captain with a cheerful grin, "when the conversation is steered by an expert."

"You flatter me," Trent said. "Anyhow, it did turn out that a club of that particular make had been bought some months before by a customer whom the man was able to remember. Why he remembered him was because, in the first place, he insisted on a club of rather unusual length and weight — much too long and heavy for himself to use, as he was neither a tall man nor of powerful build. The salesman had suggested as much in a delicate way; but the customer said no, he knew exactly what suited him, and he bought the club."

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"Rather an ass, I should say," Royden observed thoughtfully.

"I don't think he was an ass, really. He was capable of making a mistake, though, like the rest of us. There were other things, by the way, that salesman recalled about him. He had a slight limp, and he was, or had been, an Army officer. The salesman was an ex-Service man, and he couldn't be mistaken, he said, about that."

Captain Royden had drawn a sheet of paper towards him, and was slowly drawing little geometrical figures as he listened. "Go on, Mr. Trent," he said.

"Well, to come back to the subject of Freer's death. I think he was killed by someone who knew Freer never played on Sunday, so that his clubs would be — or ought to be, shall we say? — in his locker all that day. All the following night, too, of course — in case the job took a long time. And I think this man was in a position to have access to the lockers in this clubhouse at any time he chose, and to possess a master key to those lockers. I think he was a skillful amateur craftsman. I think he had a good practical knowledge of high explosives. There is a branch of the Army" — Trent paused a moment and looked at the cigarette box on the table — "in which that sort of knowledge is specially necessary, I believe."

Hastily, as if just reminded of the duty of hospitality, Royden lifted the lid of the box and pushed it towards Trent. "Do have another," he urged.

Trent did so with thanks. "They have to have it in the Royal Engineers," he went on, "because — so I'm told — demolition work is an important part of their job."

"Quite right," Captain Royden observed, delicately shading a cube.

"*Ubique!*" Trent mused, staring at the box lid. "If you are 'everywhere,' I take it you can be in two places at the same time. You could kill a man in one place, and at the same time be having breakfast with a friend a mile away. Well, to return to our subject once more, you can see the kind of idea I was led to form about what happened to Freer. I believe that his brassie was taken from his locker on the Sunday before his death. I believe the ivorine face of it was taken off and a cavity hollowed out behind it; and in that cavity a charge of high explosive was placed. Where it came from I don't know, for it isn't the sort of thing that is easy to come by, I imagine."

"Oh, there would be no difficulty about that," the captain remarked. "If this man you're speaking of knew all about H.E., as you say, he could have compounded the stuff himself from materials anybody can buy. For instance, he could easily make tetranitroaniline — that would be just the thing for him, I should say."

"I see. Then perhaps there would be a tiny detonator attached to the inner side of the ivorine face, so that a good smack with the brassie would set it off. Then the face would be fixed on again. It would be a delicate job, because the weight of the clubhead would have to be exactly right.

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The feel and balance of the club would have to be just the same as before the operation."

"A delicate job, yes," the captain agreed. "But not an impossible one. There would be rather more to it than you say, as a matter of fact; the face would have to be shaved down thin, for instance. Still, it could be done."

"Well, I imagined it done. Now, this man I have in mind knew there was no work for a brassie at the short first hole, and that the first time it would come out of the bag was at the second hole, down at the bottom of the dip, where no one could see what happened. What certainly did happen was that Freer played a sweet shot, slap on to the green. What else happened at the same moment we don't know for certain, but we can make a reasonable guess. And then, of course, there's the question what happened to the club — or what was left of it; the handle, say. But it isn't a difficult question, I think, if we remember how the body was found."

"How do you mean?" Royden asked.

"I mean, by whom it was found. One of the two players who found it was too much upset to notice very much. He hurried back to the clubhouse; and the other was left alone with the body for, as I estimate it, at least fifteen minutes. When the police came on the scene, they found lying near the body a perfectly good brassie, an unusually long and heavy club, exactly like Freer's brassie in every respect — except one. The name stamped on the wood of the clubhead had been obliterated by crushing. That name, I think, was not F. MacAdam, but Nelson's; and the club had been taken out of a bag that was not Freer's — a bag which had the remains, if any, of Freer's brassie at the bottom of it. And I believe that's all." Trent got to his feet and stretched his arms. "You can see what I meant when I said I found the mystery interesting."

For some moments Captain Royden gazed thoughtfully out of the window; then he met Trent's inquiring eye. "If there was such a fellow as you imagine," he said coolly, "he seems to have been careful enough — lucky enough too, if you like — to leave nothing at all of what you could call proof against him. And probably he had personal and private reasons for what he did. Suppose that somebody whom he was much attached to was in the power of a foul-tempered, bullying brute; and suppose he found that the bullying had gone to the length of physical violence; and suppose that the situation was hell by day and by night to this man of yours; and suppose there was no way on earth of putting an end to it except the way he took. Yes, Mr. Trent; suppose all that!"

"I will — I do!" Trent said. "That man — if he exists at all — must have been driven pretty hard, and what he did is no business of mine anyway. And now — still in the conditional mood — suppose I take myself off."

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There are some detective-story writers whom the critics have accused of having been totally lacking in humor. Surely, for example, few readers would contend that R. Austin Freeman's work contained much of the comic or the gay; yet the late Dr. Freeman is one of the truly greats in detective-story history, and his Dr. Thorndyke, as dry and humorless as he may seem to contemporary readers, will not perish from the earth. J. S. Fletcher is another "old master" who has never been considered anything but a deadly serious writer. Few gleams of jollity shine in the pages of his many books, and while there may have been occasional mild quips in J. S. Fletcher's stories, they have never approached anything like farce or tomfoolery.

Yet, here, we submit, is a short story by Mr. Fletcher that has in it the budding seeds of comedy. No, you won't laugh out loud, but we wouldn't be at all surprised if you chuckled. Mr. Fletcher's humor is gentle and sedate — but humor nevertheless . . .

MR. MANN OF LONDON

by J. S. FLETCHER

SINCE IT IS NOW THE MODE FOR folk to live in houses whereof the walls are fashioned of crystal-clear glass, everybody who reads the society papers and the personal paragraphs in what was once the halfpenny press is well aware that the Secretary for Superfluities (one of the many recently created offices the tenancy of which carries Cabinet rank) is an ardent and even besotted devotee of golf. He has frequently been pictured in the illustrated press playing golf with the Prime Minister, or with the Bishop of Millborough, or with Mr. Woking Waye, the eminent comedian; everybody is familiar with these intimate representations of his tall, spare figure, his attenuated shanks, his old tweed suit, his ascetic face, and with the monocle which is forever fixed in his right eye — and especially with the monocle.

About that monocle there is a tradition in Parliamentary and official circles — it is said that its wearer has never been seen without it, even by his valet. The valet's testimony, indeed, has been referred to in whispers; he alleges that ever since he entered his master's service, some ten or twelve years ago, the Secretary has had that bit of glass in his eye when found in bed of a morning, and is still wearing it when he assumes his pajamas at night. Certain people of the

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over-inquisitive persuasion declare that there is a reason for this supplementary aid to nature. The Secretary, they say, is one of those rare specimens of humanity who is endowed with odd organs of vision; his left eye, they affirm, is gray, while the other, shielded by the monocle, is of a vivid green. But as the Secretary is a confirmed bachelor, and has never had any love affairs in his five-and-forty years of existence, nobody is in a position to say whether this is definitely true or not; the matter remains one of profound speculation. But there is no speculation about the monocle, and it is a well known fact that when the monocle (an unusually large one of slightly tinted glass) is turned upon anyone, whether a foolishly pertinacious member of Parliament or a permanent official who goes wrong with his decimals or a caddie who coughs at the critical moment, the effect is peculiarly awe-striking, and pretty much the same might be expected if the Sphinx suddenly lifted an eyelid and blasted with a glare of living light some miserable wayfarer of the desert.

The fact is that the Secretary himself is a bit of a Sphinx, a sort of secret man, on occasion. His public life is, to be sure, well known; it has been already narrated that he is often featured in the picture papers. He is famous in Parliament for the cleverness and ingenuity of his speeches; no man of his day knows better how to persuade people to do the things which they ought not to do. He is also known in society as a regular diner-out, a teller of tales with an acid flavor, and as a giver of quiet little dinners to select intellectuals. But all this is done between Mondays and Fridays; between Friday and Monday the Secretary for Superfluities disappears from the public field of vision. He is never seen at any fashionable place of worship, nor found at a country house, and his valet can prove that he is not at home. Not even the valet knows where he goes on Friday evening. He suspects golf — and in this he is right. But it is not the golf of the illustrated papers, wherein the Secretary figures with distinguished statesmen, ecclesiastics, and music-hall artists; that is all part of the public business, and has its uses. Like most other much-occupied men, the Secretary knows the value of privacy and retreat, and he long since found out how to get both. He knows where, in a certain southern county, far off the beaten track, there is a nice little golf links, and near it an equally nice old country inn of the sort that you only read of in novels, and it is to these oases in the desert of modernity that he betakes himself weekends as often as he can, not in his full style and title — which is considerable and impressive when fully set out — but as plain Mr. Mann from London.

When he first lighted upon this Arcadia — accidentally, as most good things are discovered — the Secretary, as Mr. Mann, arranged his future on those systematic and thor-

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ough-going lines which so recommended him to the folk who pushed him into power. He neglected no detail. He took rooms at the little hotel for a year in advance. He ordered its one taxicab to be at Pimpleton Magna railway station every Friday evening at nine o'clock; if he came, he came; if he didn't, he didn't; if he did come, the taxicab was to be ready to carry him away again at seven thirty sharp on the Monday morning. He paid his subscription at the little golf club, thankful that not a single one of its members knew or recognized him; he rented a locker there and left his kit; he hinted to the secretary — a spinster lady — that he would come down as often as possible; the secretary found by experience that he came four weeks out of five. When she playfully rallied him on his fondness for their out-of-the-way retreat he was mendacious enough to drop a mysterious hint about doctor's orders. He enjoyed his weekends quietly, and he had but one fear — that somebody should find him out. However, at the end of nine months he had a comfortable reflection — so far, he was the only outsider who had ever played over those links. And no one knew him. Here, at any rate, he was Mr. Mann — a nobody.

On a certain Friday evening in the middle of November, Mr. Mann, carrying his usual modest suitcase, stepped out of a local train that had carried him to Pimpleton Magna from the main-line junction twenty miles away, nodded silently to the railway porter and the ticket collector, and walked outside to where the taxicab always awaited him. There was but a dim light hanging over the station entrance, but it was strong enough to show Mr. Mann that the driver who held open the door for him was not the person who usually steered him to the hospitable doors and red-curtained windows of the Crying Curlew. He paused, looking sharply at the unfamiliar figure — that of a strongly built broad-shouldered fellow in a chauffeur's overcoat and cap. What was in his mind was this — the road between Pimpleton Magna and the Crying Curlew was a particularly difficult and dangerous one, descending into deep dells and going round sharp corners in dark woods; it needed experience, and Mr. Mann respected his neck.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Who are you? Where's Pritchard tonight?"

The man raised his hand to his cap in a respectful salute.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he replied, "Pritchard, he's down with the lumbago, sir; can't move himself."

"I hope you know the road well?" suggested Mr. Mann. He knew the neighborhood well enough by that time to be aware that the substitute was not a native. "Live hereabouts?"

"Chauffeur to Sir Thomas for five years, sir," answered the driver. "He's just gone abroad, so I'm living in the village till I get another job. I know the road well enough, sir."

"Very good," said Mr. Mann, and

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stepped into the cab. "But mind the corners."

He sank back, folded his rug over his knees, and was carried away past the dim lights in the cottage windows. It was his habit to close his eyes and take a comfortable snooze during this seven-mile drive between station and hotel, and he did so now, and quickly fell into a light doze. But he was conscious all through his superficial slumber that he was being borne along at a much swifter rate than usual; conscious, too, that the taxicab ran more smoothly than it generally did. And he finally woke to his full senses and realized that things were not what they ought to be. By that time he knew every yard of the road from Pimpleton Magna to the Crying Curlew — and he knew that he was off it. Hereabouts they should have turned a peculiarly sharp corner and descended into Fairy Hill Bottom — and they hadn't. He threw up the window and poked his head into a very black night.

"You're on the wrong road!" he shouted irascibly. "You should have turned —"

The driver shouted back, without stopping or decreasing his pace, "Tree down and across the road the other way, sir!" he called. "Got to go round."

Mr. Mann closed the window and sank back in his seat once more. The cab flew on; it seemed to be on a straight, level road now, one quite unfamiliar to him, judging by its surface, and its driver increased its pace to one which was certainly above the speed limit. And at that Mr. Mann once again leaned out and shouted. But this time he got no answer, except that the man at whose mercy he had placed himself drove ahead faster than before. Mr. Mann got a glimpse of the road along which they were careening; the headlight showed him a straight, well-kept road, evidently a highway, bordered by great trees, the first fringe of the border of a wood. It was all unfamiliar to him.

Once more he sank back in his seat, this time to think very seriously. There was no doubt about things now; he was being run away with — kidnaped! There would be a development presently — he would find himself in the presence of somebody who wanted him. But did that somebody want Mr. Mann or the Cabinet Minister? It did not require much reflection to enable him to settle that question. And suddenly, in the darkness of the cab, he slipped his hand into an inner pocket of his clothing, feeling for something. . . .

Ten minutes later, after various twistings to the right and turnings to the left, the cab came to a dead stop, and with a calmness that would have done credit to a statue and with an expression even more inscrutable than that which his features usually assumed, Mr. Mann quietly opened the door and stepped out — to find himself in the presence of three men, each of whom wore a mask of black velvet across face and eyes. The captive looked them over in the glow

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of the lamps — big men all, and well dressed. And in the right hand of the biggest and nearest was a revolver.

For a moment a curious silence fell on all of them — it was broken by the sharp cry of an owl in the adjoining wood. Somehow that sound broke the ice among the human beings. But it was the kidnaped man who spoke, and as he spoke he so placed himself that the light fell full on his face, and especially on the monocle in his right eye. Something in that bit of glass and in the lines of the thin-lipped mouth beneath the well arched nose suggested cold contempt. And the tones of the captive's voice were cold enough.

"Well," he said. "And what now?"

None of the three men seemed particularly disposed to speak; there was obvious hesitation. And at that the man who faced them laughed — and in such a fashion that the holder of the revolver started.

"Just so!" said the captive, sneeringly. "You were about to say —?"

Words then came — quickly, and not without a suspicion of nervousness.

"What we are about to say, Mr. Secretary, is this," said the armed man. "We want a certain document which we know you have on you or about you; it may be in your pocket or in your suitcase. You know well enough what it is — so hand it over!"

The Secretary quietly put a hand inside his overcoat, and his captors drew a little nearer. But what he brought out was a cigar case, and he not only helped himself to a cigar, but lighted it carefully and deliberately before replying.

"A document, eh?" he said. "Now, what document?"

"I've already said that you know as well as we do what document!" snapped out the leader. "There is only one document that's of any importance just now. You know that too. There are so many copies of it — one for each member of the Cabinet — and you had yours on you when you left Downing Street after the Cabinet Council this afternoon. And you've never been out of our sight since. Hand it over, Mr. Secretary!"

The Secretary blew out a thin stream of smoke and sniffed it appreciatively.

"I should like to argue that point with you," he said. "Let us assume that when I left the Cabinet Council — you perceive that I make no attempt to deny that I was there — I had such a document in my possession. Where did I go, then? — since you seem to be so well acquainted with my movements."

"You went straight to Waterloo, got your suitcase out of the cloakroom, and booked for Pimpleton Magna," answered the leader quickly. "You changed trains at Pilbury Junction, and came on this way at once."

"And from Waterloo to Pilbury," remarked the Secretary, "I had a first-class compartment all to myself. So, you didn't have me under observation for at least a hundred and thirty-five miles! Come now!"

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"Not under close observation, but we knew where you were, and which compartment," retorted the leader. "And we watched you into the local train that runs between Pilbury and Pimpleton. You've been nowhere where you could get rid of that document, Mr. Secretary. It's on you, and we are going to have it!"

"Does it not occur to you that during my nearly three hours' solitary journey I might have made myself thoroughly acquainted with the contents of that document and then destroyed it?" said the Secretary. "I put it to your intelligence."

"Our intelligence convinces us that you would do no such thing!" replied the other. "We know more than you think. We know that that document, probably a very brief one, contains a certain suggestion which you Cabinet ministers have got to consider and study most closely between now and Tuesday. You wouldn't destroy it — you have it! Come, now, Mr. Secretary, don't oblige us to use force. This is a fair and square holdup, engineered with great care. You haven't the remotest idea as to whom you're dealing with, but we are going to have that paper, mere scrap though it may be. Once more — hand it over!"

The Secretary took a pull or two at his cigar. His monocle seemed to glare more than ever. "Let me tell you something," he said suavely. "You are doubtless gentlemen of vast ability and immense resource. But you are not the only people in this world who possess brain power. I myself have a certain — perhaps a small — amount. When I discovered that I was being kidnaped by your accomplice, who told me tarradiddles at Pimpleton Station, I immediately came to the conclusion that I should presently be held up by somebody who was after the momentous scrap of paper which I certainly did carry away from Downing Street, and which, I may tell you, I have not yet even looked at. And now, I put it to you — do you think a man in my position would take risks? Don't you think — you are evidently men of common sense — don't you think that such a man would take the precaution, while time remained, to destroy . . . ?"

The three men started, and the leader rapped out the first word of a question. "You — ?"

The Secretary laughed. And then he suddenly moved back to the open door of the taxicab, and, motioning the men to draw near, struck a match and showed them lying on the leather-covered cushion of the front seat a tiny fluffment of gray ash. "You can draw your own conclusions," he continued, as he laid his hand on his small suitcase. "But — as I think you will now want your taxicab for yourselves — I shall thank you to tell me the nearest way to the Crying Curlew."

An hour later, carrying his modest baggage and fresh as paint, Mr. Mann walked into his beloved hostelry. Its landlord exclaimed loudly at the sight of him.

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"Lord bless 'ee, Mr. Mann," he said, "'tis never you! Why, we got a telegram from 'ee this very afternoon sayin' as how you warn't a-coming this weekend!"

"Changed my mind at the last minute," answered Mr. Mann. "How are you, Tomkins?"

Presently he was in his bedroom alone. He went up to the toilet table, lighted the candles thereon, and did a thing that no mortal had ever seen him do. He took off his monocle, and from the cavity behind it he took out an artificial eye, and from a hollow in that glass orb he extracted a tightly compressed scrap of filmy paper, which he presently smoothed out and transferred to a wallet in his hip pocket. That done, he replaced eye and monocle, and in the character of Mr. Mann, the quiet gentleman from London, went cheerily downstairs to his improvised supper.

In "Mr. Mann of London," J. S. Fletcher has played with more than one classic'tec theme. There is the kidnaping-of-the-Cabinet-Minister — surely, one of the oldest standbys of the British crime writer and one of the grand old gambits of the Edgar Wallace school. There is the state-document-whose-loss-would-rock-the-foundations-of-the-Empire — another tried-and-true sleuthian staple. But even more classical in conception is the secret-hiding-place-on-one's-person — a device so much a part of the very fabric of detective stories that it can never grow stale or be overworked, providing the writer finds a new wrinkle on the old chestnut.

It does seem that every possible hiding place on or in the human body has been put to detective-story use: the artificial finger, hand, arm, or leg; the false humpback; hollow teeth and dentures; and other places anatomical. Then there are the supplementary variations — what might be called the civilized appurtenances of the human body: the cane, the umbrella, and the crutch; shoes, with hollow soles or heels; false pockets and other hiding places in all manner of clothing; toupees, wigs, and in the case of a Chinese in a Sax Rohmer story, the knot of a queue, large enough to contain a fabulous jewel. The catalogue of concealment is long and honorable.

Mr. Fletcher's hiding-place — the hollow in a glass eye — is one of the great conceptions in this subdivision of the genre. Its classic use, however, must be attributed to another "old master" — Maurice Leblanc, whose stature is still profoundly underrated by most critics — in one of Leblanc's finest detective novels, THE CRYSTAL STOPPER *(1913).*

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OVER MY DEAD BODY

by ANTHONY GILBERT

"NURSE!" CALLED MRS. FARREN in her pretty, fretful voice. "Nurse, where are you?"

"Coming," called Nurse Anstruther, and a moment later she bustled into the room, a brisk, trim little woman, as hard as nails, Mrs. Farren complained. "What is it now?"

"My pillows," moaned Mrs. Farren. "And I think I have a temperature."

Nurse Anstruther shook up the pillows and took her patient's temperature, which, as she expected, was normal, and said she'd just been down for a cup of tea.

"Tea's poison to me," moaned Mrs. Farren. "Isn't it time for my medicine?"

"Not till three o'clock."

"Time goes so slowly when you're laid up. Isn't Joy back yet?"

"Your daughter went out to lunch, you remember, Mrs. Farren."

"She didn't say she was going to be late, though she knows how I worry about her. Young people are so self-absorbed . . ."

"A quarter to three's not late to come back from lunch. And Joy's not a child. She's thirty."

"She'll always be a child to me. And anyhow there was plenty of lunch here. I have the appetite of a bird . . ."

"A marauding eagle," reflected Nurse, and aloud she said, "It wouldn't be the same thing. She's lunching with Captain Waterhouse, you know . . ."

"I didn't know." Mrs. Farren forgot her languor. "Did she tell you?"

Nurse Anstruther laughed. "Who else does she ever lunch with these days? I expect they're making their final plans."

"Plans for what?"

"Well, a blind man could see they're head over ears in love. He practically lives on your doorstep."

"Nurse, you must be out of your mind! Thank Heaven, Captain Waterhouse goes back to his cannibals and hottentots next month and then . . . What's so funny?"

"There aren't any cannibals or hottentots in Kenya where Joy will be going. My sister's there and . . ."

Mrs. Farren brushed Nurse's sister aside. "Joy's certainly not going to Kenya. I shouldn't hear of it."

"I fancy she'll go just the same. Well, you don't want her to be an old maid, do you, and you've had her a long time. Now, it's time you had your medicine. Shall I pour it out for you?"

"You know I always take my own. I prefer it. My life has made me very careful. People are so careless, unscrupulous even, and I don't want any chance of getting the bottles mixed so that I get the wrong dose."

"Not much chance of that," said

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Nurse. She never took offense at Mrs. Farren. If she did she wouldn't have time for anything else. "I've been nursing for twenty-five years and I've never poisoned a patient yet."

Mrs. Farren put out her hand and took a tall round bottle off the table beside her. This was "my medicine," to be taken every six hours. She had another bottle of quite different shape that contained her sleeping-mixture. The two mixtures looked so much alike that Dr. Sampson made a point of putting them up in bottles impossible to confuse, and in addition each was conspicuously labeled. Nurse watched Mrs. Farren measure out a careful dose and recork the bottle.

"Now you can make my coffee on the gas ring," she said. "About Joy, you'll find you're quite wrong. She's very young for her age, but not so young she'd be taken in by that — that adventurer."

At that moment a door downstairs clashed. "That'll be her back," remarked Nurse. "You can ask her for yourself."

Joy Farren was a tall, fair girl with brilliant eyes, and a face bright with happiness. She must have been lovely ten years ago, and now that she was in love youth had flowed back to her face.

"How late you are, darling. I've been so worried. Couldn't you have telephoned or something?"

"It's only just three. We had so much to arrange the time absolutely flew."

"We?"

"Guy and I. He's just heard he's to sail next month and he wants us to get married immediately, so that I can leave with him. Oh, mother, I never thought I'd be as happy as this again."

Mrs. Farren raised herself on one elbow. "Are you mad, Joy? There can't be any question of your marrying Captain Waterhouse."

"But I am, I am! Oh mother, isn't it wonderful . . ."

"It's preposterous," said Mrs. Farren shortly. "The fact is, you've let yourself get carried away, and quite lost your head. He's not the least the sort of man I intend you to marry. And how you can talk in this heartless fashion about leaving me . . ."

"I must marry Guy," said Joy, hoarsely. "If I stay this time it'll be too late."

"If he's as fickle as that . . ."

"It's not a question of being fickle. But I haven't forgotten Alan Pearce and Maurice after him, and — the truth is, you don't mean me to marry at all."

"I should have thought you owed your mother something. Nurse, what are you gaping there for? I shan't want you for the next hour. My daughter and I have important matters to discuss."

As she passed Joy, Nurse Anstruther whispered, Good luck, but her heart was heavy. Mrs. Farren was a past master at getting her own way and she'd run Joy ragged for years. The row had started when she closed the front door and it was still going on

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when she returned an hour later. Now it was clear that Mrs. Farren was going all out for victory.

"Over my dead body," she was saying, as Nurse came in. "I'm sure you don't want my death on your conscience. Later you'll be grateful to me for saving you from yourself."

During the days that followed it became increasingly clear that Joy and her lover would be defeated. Mrs. Farren refused to discuss the matter further. "All this argument will kill me," she said. "You know what care I have to take of myself." And she added that presently, when she felt a little stronger, they would go away together somewhere, say to Bournemouth.

It was then that Nurse Anstruther came to a startling decision. "Over my dead body," Mrs. Farren had said, and "So be it," decided Nurse. Her plan was simplicity itself. She merely proposed to change the contents of the medicine bottles so that when Mrs. Farren took her six o'clock draught she would, in fact, be taking a fatal dose of sleeping-mixture. She always liked to be left alone between six and seven, and by that time it would be too late to do anything about it. When the truth was discovered, it would be assumed that she'd made a mistake (for Nurse would put the mixtures back again before calling the doctor).

Nurse felt no more compunction about what she proposed to do than she'd have felt about squashing a wasp. Events helped her plan. On the day she resolved to put it into action, Mrs. Farren had a visitor, a Mrs. Christie, whose advent distracted the self-styled invalid (Invalid, my foot! said Nurse, she's as able to look after herself as I am!) and provided an opportunity to make the exchange without attracting attention.

Mrs. Farren spent the whole visit bemoaning her daughter's attitude. "It's a miserable thing to grow old and know you're unwanted," she said. "My life's a burden and I shall be thankful when I can lay it down."

When Mrs. Christie went away she said to Nurse, "Dear me, she is in the dumps. I suppose it's all right her having that sleeping-stuff beside the bed? I should keep an eye on her if I were you. In her present mood she might do anything."

"I hadn't thought of that," murmured Nurse Anstruther truthfully. "But thanks for the tip."

She looked in on Mrs. Farren on her way up; her patient was lying back against the pillows, with closed eyes. "I don't want to be disturbed, Nurse," she said. "Mrs. Christie's quite worn me out. I shall try and get some sleep."

For about an hour the house was perfectly quiet. Then, at a quarter to six, Mrs. Farren's bell rang, and her voice could be heard imperiously demanding the attendance of everyone in the household. When she had them all — Joy, Nurse, and the cook, Mrs. Palmer — lined up at the foot of the

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bed, she told them, "I want you all to hear what I have to say. Then you can alibi each other. And, Joy, you're going to get your own way after all. I only hope you won't regret it."

"You mean, you're going to agree to our marriage?" Joy couldn't believe her ears. Nor could Nurse Anstruther.

"I mean, I shan't be here to disagree. It seemed to me the only way out. I'm a burden and so — and so I've taken a double dose of my sleeping-mixture. It's no good looking like that, Joy. It's too late to do anything. Enjoy your marriage. It's cost me my life."

Joy looked as if she would faint. Mrs. Palmer cried, "The doctor, Nurse, get the doctor."

Mrs. Farren repeated triumphantly, "It's too late."

Only Nurse Anstruther remained composed. "Now don't take on, anyone," she said. "There's no harm done. Mrs. Farren, you haven't taken a fatal dose at all. All you've had is a double helping of your ordinary medicine, and that wouldn't hurt a fly. You see," she explained to the others, "when Mrs. Christie warned me Mrs. Farren was in one of her moods, just to be on the safe side I switched the contents of the bottles. So when (Nurse turned back to her patient) when you took two spoonfuls out of the one marked Sleeping Mixture you were just taking an overdose of tonic. Of course, I meant to change them back later . . . (Well, so she had, but couldn't you depend on the old witch to cheat at the eleventh hour?) Why, Mrs. Farren, what is it?"

For her patient had suddenly pulled herself erect and her face was ghastly with fear. "Is — that — true?" she panted.

"Of course, it's true. Now, let's have no more of these theatricals . . ."

But the woman pushed away her restraining hand. "Don't touch me, you — you murdering fool," she whispered. "Do you know what you've done? How was I to guess you'd play a trick like that? I meant to give you all a fright — that was all — and so before I took the dose I changed the contents of the bottles — do you understand? *I changed them back.*"

A coroner's jury absolved Nurse Anstruther from blame, the coroner remarking that she had taken a somewhat unconventional step to prevent possible tragedy. "The court," he said, "does not hold you in any degree responsible for Mrs. Farren's death."

But Nurse Anstruther is not sure to this day whether she is a murderess or not . . . .

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Perhaps you remember Wyndham Martyn as the creator of Anthony Trent, one of fiction's many "master criminals" (circa 1920) . . . Here is a yarn by Mr. Martyn that almost epitomizes the kind of story which was at the height of its popularity just after the turn of the century. It is in one of the great traditions of the genre — the tradition molded by Grant Allen in his Colonel Clay stories, by E. W. Hornung in his tales of Raffles, by Clifford Ashdown in his adventures of Romney Pringle, with just a touch of Richard Harding Davis and a foreshadowing of the great Arsène Lupin . . . a tale with the flavor of hansom cabs, London nights, and crooks in evening clothes . . .

THE ABSTRACTOR

by WYNDHAM MARTYN

AT ABOUT HALF-PAST ELEVEN ON a night of early August, a young man in evening dress dismissed his hansom outside St. George's Hospital and walked slowly down Grosvenor Place.

When distant from the hospital about two hundred yards he paused in a little island of darkness between the lamps on the Palace wall side of the street, and gazed earnestly at one of the huge houses opposite him. With something like a start he saw that a police-constable was watching him from the corner, and there came over the young man in evening dress a remarkable change. A heavy mustache appeared where a moment before had been a well-shaped, clean-shaven upper lip, and the straight back grew old and bent.

The policeman, who was watching him with somnolent curiosity rather than professional keenness, would have sworn that the man in the shadow, who lit a cigarette, and therefore displayed his face to the constable's gaze, was a heavily-mustached bent man of fifty or more. But he was thinking more of a good night's sleep, when he should be relieved of duty, than the baiting of burglars, and passed on with stately tread in the direction of Victoria.

The man in evening dress quickly crossed the road and ran up the steps. Apparently he possessed a latch-key, for he let himself into the house almost instantly. It might have struck a casual observer, perhaps, that it was odd that a man being sufficiently at home to carry a latch-key should conduct himself with such caution when inside the house as to carry a pocket lamp and endeavor to avoid making a sound. But this the man

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did, and ascending a flight of very wide stairs paused before a door and listened carefully. When he had remained silent for some three minutes he placed his electric light in his pocket, opened the door, and stepped into the room. It was a self-closing door, and before he knew it there was a click, and a rosette of electric lights flooded the room with a sudden radiance that almost blinded him.

Shielding his eyes from the glare, he saw, sitting in a blue-leather chair, only a few feet away, a middle-aged man, like himself arrayed in the garb which fashion prescribes for evening wear. For a second he stared at the man, stupefied, and then his hand went to his pocket with lightning quickness.

"Don't shoot," said the other calmly, as he gazed with interest into the dull barrel of a revolver. "A .38 makes the devil of a row, and I imagine you don't want to have the servants coming up to see what is the matter."

Seeing that the man with the revolver seemed uncertain what to do, he reassured him.

"You need not think I carry such a weapon. It would spoil the hang of one's clothes too much."

The man standing up put the revolver away with a smile.

"I'll take your word for it," he said.

"Good," exclaimed the other. "Now, as you entered without the usual formalities, and I don't know your name, do you mind telling me? It needn't be the real one, you know; only if by any chance the friend I am expecting should come in — he's an old enough friend to enter unannounced, just as you did — I should feel awkward if I didn't know it. You might object to being introduced as Mr. Smith."

The other smiled ruefully, and looked about him quickly.

"I'm cornered," he said. "The door's locked. The windows are out of the question. The theatre hansoms are streaming down to the station, and if I shoot, the servants will be up in thirty seconds."

"You've summed up the situation very well," said the other, "but you didn't answer my question."

"Oh! my name's John Exe."

"X the unknown. A good name for a gentleman of the profession of — er — er ——"

"I'm a professional abstractor, my lord."

"So you know my name?".

Exe shook his head pityingly. "Do you think a professional abstractor of any experience would go into a house without knowing all there was to be discovered about it?"

"You're right!" cried his lordship. "A silly question for me to ask. What was it — my lady's jewels or my silver?"

"It seems rather indelicate to say both," said Exe; "but I had set my mind on both of them."

"Jove!" exclaimed his lordship, "you're ambitious!"

"Without it I should be a mere burglar. As it is I am a collector —

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à la main gauche, if you like — but still a collector."

Lord St. Breward looked at him in a kindly fashion.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I've misjudged members of your profession. A liking for Dickens in early youth may have been the cause of it. One remembers that Bill Sikes had neither morals nor manners. You talk as an educated man does, are recently shaved, and your hands are in good condition."

Mr. John Exe looked at the speaker as though he were not sure what he meant.

"You are not quite what I pictured you," he observed slowly. "You are represented as being a very quick-tempered man, whereas you seem ——"

"Don't say inhospitable," cried his lordship briskly. "Anything but that. What are you going to drink? There is plenty of whiskey, and the siphons are full."

Mr. Exe poured himself a drink in which whiskey and soda were equally blended. He had an idea that he would sleep in the station-house that night, and this might be the last drink he would get for many a day.

"These cigars," said his lordship, offering his case, "aren't at all bad. They are the ones I usually keep for my own use."

"Thanks," said Exe. Then, as he lighted it and puffed at it a few times, he leaned back in the chair opposite Lord St. Breward and scrutinized him closely.

There was no sign of weakness in the pleasantly-spoken peer. Face and body were strong, and Exe thought there was very little chance for him to leave the great house in Grosvenor Place unless his lordship allowed. And as a self-reliant abstractor, Exe played the game well enough to know that tonight he had failed, and must take the consequences. But he was not the kind of man to whine.

Presently the silence began to depress him, and he poured out another drink, and his tongue wagged more freely.

"How's this going to end?" he demanded.

Lord St. Breward frowned slightly. "Please moderate your voice," he said. "I am not anxious to have my man find you here. I see so few people that he will not recognize you as a friend, and I think you will not wish him to guess who you are."

"Why shouldn't he think I am your friend?" asked Exe a trifle sourly.

His lordship spoke more amiably. "I don't want to seem rude, Mr. Exe, but Barber would notice at once that you are wearing a ready-made white tie with a dinner jacket and white waistcoat. Also that your socks, though of silk, are not black. He would understand that my friends do not dress so."

Exe in no way seemed to resent this.

"You're right," he admitted. "That's where I have failed once or twice. I don't drop my aitches, or

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commit grammatical errors, but I do make mistakes in small things like this."

He extended a well-shod foot and exhibited bright-colored hose.

Lord St. Breward lit another cigar and pushed his case over to Exe.

"What made you," he said, "choose tonight to come here and — er — collect?"

Exe took a clipping from the Society column of a daily paper, and read: "The Earl and Countess of St. Breward, with their children, left London this morning for Glenfierth. The grouse are said to be exceptionally strong this season, and his lordship and the three guns who will join him in Perthshire are certain to get good sport."

"Seems I got good enough sport, although I missed my train at King's Cross," commented the peer thoughtfully. "So that notice fetched you?"

"I'd like to get my hands on the man who wrote it," snapped Exe viciously.

"But consider that if he hadn't written it I shouldn't have met a real, live abstractor," said the other.

"Yes, you'd have missed your sport, and I should have missed the opportunity for a season's instruction in sculpturing at Portland." Exe laughed a trifle nervously.

"Don't talk about unpleasant things," said Lord St. Breward. "Tell me, are you really fond of antique silverware, apart from its intrinsic value?"

"Really," said Exe earnestly. "I have spent hours in the British Museum and at South Kensington."

"I'll show you some of mine," said the other, rising for the first time. "Only do step lightly."

Unlocking a safe let into the wall, he took out several boxes. From one he lifted an old cup.

"This," he said lovingly, "is Elizabethan. The great Queen herself gave this to a lady of my family to whom she was godmother. It's absolutely priceless; and yet as mere silver worth no more than a fiver. Look at this Queen Anne cream jug. It bears the Edgcumbe arms on it. Now look at this piece of gold work. It's the gem of them all. Authentically the work of Benvenuto Cellini, that prince of collectors. I think very likely he sold it to a patron, and then stabbed him to get it back again. Do you know anything about his methods?"

Exe shook his head. "No; I thought he was a painter."

It took an hour or more to see the things, and many rare jewels were shown too, and at the end Exe felt dizzy at the sight of so much magnificence, which might have been his but for a missed train!

"I understand your feelings," said the owner of the treasure, "but you will recognize my prior claim, I suppose?"

Exe spoke up indignantly. "I don't drink with a man, smoke his cigars, and then rob him."

"Sorry," said the other. "I put it clumsily, I fear." He replaced the keys of the safe upon his chain and

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looked into the younger man's face kindly.

"Look here," he said, "I'm not a reformer or anything unpleasant like that, but you'll forgive me for saying that you ought to be doing a lot better for yourself than practising abstraction. How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven," answered Exe a trifle sullenly.

"Any people living?"

"Thank the Lord, no!"

"Ever been convicted?"

"Not yet."

"That's good," said the peer heartily. "You can start fair then if you get half a chance. Why did you . . . ?"

"The line of the least resistance. I don't know a trade, and I found a clerk's life a dog's life. I got thirty-five bob a week, and might never have got more than forty. There's risk here, but then I can enjoy myself. I spent three months at Scarborough last summer on what I saved. I tell you it was a dashed sight better than my two weeks when I was a clerk and had to live in a cheap boarding-house. I lived at the Grand and played billiards every night."

"Do you know any of your professional brethren?"

"Not one, and don't want to," said Exe decidedly. "They're a drinking, low lot as a rule. There's only one I would like to know, and he's the master of them all. If it hadn't been for him there would have been no stage burglars."

"You excite my curiosity," said the other. "Who is he?"

"The Marquis," said Exe. "Surely you have read about *him?*"

"Never," said the Earl. "What is there about him so notable?"

"I'll tell you," explained Exe. "Now, you knew I wasn't likely to be taken for a friend of yours because I don't know quite the right clothes to wear. These would pass in Highbury or Camberwell, but not in Grosvenor Place. The Marquis would never be found out like that, because he is the real thing. No one knows his real name, but he is the son of a nobleman."

"I'd like to meet him," said the other with interest.

"Perhaps you will," said Exe, looking meaningly at the safe.

"Well, let us forget him for the moment," said his lordship, "and turn to your case. What do you suppose I am going to do with you?"

"The police," said Exe simply.

"I think not," observed his lordship. "As a magistrate I ought to do so, and as a Lord-Lieutenant my conduct is outrageously criminal; but suppose you were to get a start in a decent life, would you chuck the abstracting?"

"I cannot live honestly on thirty-five bob a week," said Exe after a pause. "I know myself pretty well, and I couldn't do it."

"Well, then, suppose I offered to lend you enough money to get a share in a business — would you live honestly then?"

"Like a shot," said the abstractor eagerly.

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"What would you do?"

"Go into partnership with a fellow in a livery stable at Scarborough. He wants me to, but I haven't the capital to invest."

"How much will be needed?"

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds."

"I think that might be managed," said the peer. "You have given me a most entertaining evening. Paderewski would charge me a thousand for playing here. Why shouldn't you take a big fee? 'Pon my soul I enjoy you more than piano playing."

But Exe sat looking at the nobleman with the old suspicion cropping up. What sort of a man was it who would reward a burglar for breaking into his house?

He watched the other man draw a wallet from his pocket and take out a check book.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the peer. "Only one check left, and I must have that for myself. I have only three five-pound notes and eightpence."

He looked keenly at Exe. "I'm going to trust you," he said.

With that he unlocked the safe and took out a small leather case in which reposed a string of pearls.

"These," he said, "are valued at about two thousand pounds. Now, you must in the course of your professional work have need to resort to men who buy such things and ask no questions. You understand?"

Exe nodded. "I know one fellow who takes my things."

"Take him these," said the Earl, "and make him give you as much as you can. What will he give you?"

Exe looked at the pearls carefully.

"I shall ask two thousand. He'll give twelve fifty."

"Take what you need and send the balance to this address —"

Exe produced a pencil and made ready to scribble on his cuff.

"Send the balance of the money to the Secretary of the Home for Lost and Crippled Cats, with the compliments of the Earl of St. Breward."

In a flash Exe remembered that Lord St. Breward was the eccentric peer who had been fined a dozen times for his behavior to cats. He had the most violent aversion to the entire feline race, and had shot them from bedroom windows, set his terriers on them in the street, and generally tried to exterminate them. There had even been a meeting convened in St. Martin's Town Hall about him, and a question had been asked in the House of Commons.

Perhaps the peer divined his thoughts, for he added: "I fear I have been given a bad name causelessly, and this will prove that I am not the brute people think I am. As a matter of fact, Mr. Exe, I like cats very much. Now, Mr. Exe, I do not want you to mention to anyone that I lent you the money. Some day I will come and ask you for it, but, until I do, keep it quiet."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Exe, who was only beginning to realize that there might be some days of honest happiness before him.

"I know, I know," said the Earl

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kindly, "but I don't want your thanks. Buy your livery stable and be an honest man. There may be plenty of others who would give all they had if they could start fair again as you are going to do."

He seemed as though he were going to add something, but suddenly extended his hand. "Goodbye, and remember to go out very quietly."

Not many yards from the Standard Theatre at Shoreditch there lives an elderly man who has a modest shop in which he mends watches and jewelery. He betrayed no annoyance when at 3:30 in the morning Mr. Exe roused him from his slumbers. At eight o'clock his son, steward on a boat running to Rotterdam, left for the Dutch port with Lady St. Breward's pearl necklace in his pocket. Exe, who had secured fifteen hundred pounds for the pearls, wired at once to Scarborough saying he would accept the proffered partnership and would start that night for Yorkshire. The Secretary of the Home for Lost and Crippled Cats, when he understood that the cat-hating Cornish peer had given seven hundred and fifty pounds, sent the news posthaste to the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Morning Post*, and spent three shillings and ninepence halfpenny in a long telegram of thanks.

Exe, after sending the money to the cats, went home to bed. He arose at 9 P.M., packed his clothes, caught the midnight train to the North, and slept until Rugby was reached. Then he commenced to read the papers he had brought with him to beguile the journey, and his attention was at once riveted to a column whose headline read:

GREAT ROBBERY AT
LORD ST. BREWARD'S TOWN HOUSE.

The entire collection of antique silver and most of Lady St. Breward's valuable jewels were stolen last night between the hours of twelve and four. So far, no particulars are forthcoming, and will not be until his lordship, who left for Scotland yesterday morning, is apprised of his loss. The caretaker and his wife were overpowered and gagged, they both say, by a man in evening dress. The Scotland Yard authorities have reason to believe that the burglary is the work of the celebrated cracksman known as the Marquis.

Thus it was that Exe obtained the wish of his life and met the magnificent Marquis. He sat almost dazed to think that he had been so utterly deceived, and there was in his reflection nothing of jealousy, but only admiration. But when he read in the columns of the same paper that the Earl had given seven hundred and fifty pounds to the support of the animals he loathed, the humor of the situation seized upon him, and he laughed aloud with so much vigor that the elderly lady in the corner glared at him with a severity that was utterly unable to check his mirth.

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THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

Surely we are not stretching to assume that most mystery fans are familiar with the work of Elisabeth Sanxay Holding. She has been writing for thirty years, has more than twenty-five full-length novels to her credit, and has written numerous short stories which have appeared in virtually all the leading magazines. And since we all know Miss Holding's work so well, we should know pretty much what to expect in a new Elisabeth Sanxay Holding story. But, ah, that's one of the grandest virtues in what John Dickson Carr has called the "grandest game in the world" — the detective story, whose very lifeblood is the element of surprise, and more surprise . . . Anthony Boucher summed up Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's contribution to the genre in his review of Miss Holding's TOO MANY BOTTLES: *"Back in the early Thirties," wrote Mr. Boucher, "before anybody had ever heard of 'psychological novels of suspense,' Elisabeth Sanxay Holding was writing them, and brilliantly." Mr. Boucher then went on to praise Miss Holding's "subtlety, realistic conviction and incredible economy . . . she's in a class by herself."*

Well, last year Miss Holding submitted a short story to EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest, and it won a Third Prize. Was it a study-in-miniature of psychological suspense? Was it a shrewd and revealing analysis of character, "with the Holding skill for making your nerves twitch"? No, indeed! It proved to be a totally unexpected type of 'tec, especially from the typewriter of Elisabeth Sanxay Holding. For here is Miss Holding in a new mood, a playful, devastating Miss Holding writing a satire on — of all things! — the hardboiled school. And, we might add, with special emphasis on the work of Raymond Chandler.

We don't have to tell you how difficult it is, even for the most experienced writers, to achieve a really successful burlesque. But we think you will agree that Miss Holding's parody of a private-eye is "one for the books." And do you know what we liked best about "Farewell, Big Sister"? The detective's name. It is le nom juste *— an absolute inspiration for the name of a Marlowe-Spade-hammer-and-tongs 'tec.*

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FAREWELL, BIG SISTER

by ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING

THE knob of my office door was turning, very quietly. I sat where I was, with my feet up on the desk. I just pressed a button that makes the right-hand top drawer slide open, where my .38 lay handy. If it was anybody okay, he would knock. If it was somebody out to get me, I was better off where I was. I could duck down behind the desk.

The door was opening, and it was a doll. All right. Still I stay put. A doll can be maybe worse than a man. But this one was enough to knock you out, just to look at her. She was around eight feet high, green eyes, blonde hair down to her waist, and she was well-stacked; she knocked the lamp off my desk when she came in the door.

"Sorry," she said.

"You got nothing to be sorry about," I said.

She sat down. I held out a pack of cigarettes and she pulled one out. I got up then and gave her a light.

"You Corney Bassard?" she asked.

"That's me," I say.

"I've heard about you," she said. "Only you never know what to believe."

"I do," I said. "If I didn't, I wouldn't get far."

"I hear you charge plenty," she said.

She crossed her knees then, and I came close to blacking out for a moment after a look at those gams, in purple nylon.

"I haven't got much," she said.

"I wouldn't know about that," I said. "What's your trouble?"

She took a long drag on the cigarette, and blew out the smoke in hard, quick, purple puffs.

"I want to find out who murdered my husband," she said.

"Hard to keep the cops out of a thing like that," I said.

"I had the cops in," she said. "They just said, why would it be a murder? They said he just walked out on me."

"Any chance it could be that way?"

She looked straight at me with those green eyes.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked. "It never happened to me yet."

"That's a thing I can believe," I said. "Give me the story, as straight as you can."

"It'll be straight," she said. "All through."

"Well," I said, "suppose we start off with your name."

"I'd rather wait for that," she said, "wait till I see if we're going to work together."

"All right, sister. Give."

"My husband disappeared about

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two months ago. We'd been married five years and —" She sort of choked up. "It was all right," she said. She waited a moment. "Then one night — he didn't come home. He'd said he was going bowling, like he often did. Said he'd be back around ten. That's the latest he ever was — ten, or maybe fifteen minutes later. Well, he didn't come. Didn't take anything with him, not a razor, or a tooth brush, not a thing. Just a couple of dollars."

"What was his job — where did he work?"

"He worked in a lending library," she said. "It's real small and his pay would make you sick, but he just wasn't ambitious."

"You work?"

"Well, sort of like a super. It pays the rent. Anyhow, Willie *was* steady. Never missed a day. He wouldn't walk out on the job — and on me. Why, he wouldn't even 've walked out on the old pup we had, before it died. And that's another pretty queer thing. The old pup died the night Willie left. I guess it sounds silly, but — I sort of thought Walcher knew. I thought — maybe it was grief, the way he was so crazy about Willie and all."

"You hear of things like that," I said. "Go ahead."

"Around midnight I went to the bowling alley where he always went. Well, he hadn't showed. I stopped in a tavern where he used to go, oh, maybe once a week, for a glass of beer, but they hadn't seen him. I went to the police station and they just said take it easy and he'll probably show up by morning. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep and early in the morning — before I was dressed, even — the cops came. They told me the library where he worked had been robbed that night. Well, you know the way cops think."

"Maybe you mean 'if,'" I said.

"They thought Willie had robbed the place and taken a powder."

"How much was gone?"

"Around sixty dollars."

"Did he happen to need any money very bad, very quick?"

"No. We've got a joint savings account."

"Well, what's your theory?"

"He might have gone down the street for a look at the library. He used to fix up the window, and he was real proud of it. And maybe a look-out there saw him while the safe was being robbed, and just conked him on the head."

"That happens," I said. "And then what d'you think they did with him?"

"They always have cars," she said.

"They do," I said.

"I've been twice to see the man that runs the bowling alley," she said. "He's a crook. He works a lot of small-time rackets, but he's got connections, all right. He's covered. I wanted the cops to get a list of who else was there that night, but they only asked Finny, and he gave them just the names he wanted. Ones that wouldn't talk."

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"Meaning Fatso Finny?"

"Yes. I kept telling Willie not to go there, but he said everything was straight, and he met some nice guys. Once in a while he'd bring one of them home, and they *were* nice guys."

"You don't feel sure he didn't go to Finny's bowling alley then?"

"I don't feel sure about *any*thing," she said. "Only Willie's gone, and the cops think he cracked that safe."

"And you don't think so?"

"I *know* he didn't. I know what Willie's like. He wasn't close to anyone. He just liked to be with me. And Walcher. Find him for me — and I'll give you five hundred. It's all we saved together, in five years."

"Find him — alive?" I said.

She rose, and her blonde head cracked with the overhead light and smashed it.

"Sorry!" she said.

"Think nothing of it," I said. "But wa-ait a minute! Wait a minute! I want your husband's name and address, and some kind of picture of him."

She opened her purse and took out a snapshot. It showed a skinny, slope-shouldered chap with a handlebar mustache, shorts, striped blazer, standing beside a bicycle.

"Sure," I said. "But I'll need something less than ninety years old."

"That was just meant to be funny," she said. "We got it down at Coney Island. That's a false mustache."

"I want his name, address, age, names of friends and relatives, school — all you can tell me."

"His name was — *is* — Willard Van Stuyvesant. He lived with me on West Eleventh Street." She gave the number. "I don't know if he had any relatives, and he didn't have any close friends. I mean, he was friendly with most people, but not close."

"What's your name and present address?" I asked.

"Sylvia," she said. "I'm called the superintendent of this lousy apartment house. What used to be called a janitress."

I asked her a lot more questions, but she didn't give. It didn't make sense to me that a girl stacked like that would have to take a job like she had.

"If he's found dead . . . ?" I said, and I didn't use any of my famous tact.

"*Anything's* better than not knowing," she said. "I get thinking that maybe he's lost his mind, and he's locked up somewhere, or . . ."

Her pocketbook was still open, and she brought out a wad of bills, with an elastic band around it.

"Keep it," I said, "Till I see if I get anywhere on this."

She came around the desk then, and kissed my cheek, and it was like a lighted match flicking my skin.

"Sugar!" she said, softly.

"Phooey," said I. "Well, you'll hear from me."

I started to work right away. I happened to be in the chips right then. I'd been paid off on a big job, so I could afford this. I went first to the lending library, and there was a

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dame there with gray hair and pince-nez, just what you'd expect.

"I thought the world of Willie," she said, beginning to cry. "And the customers did, too. He'd *never* do a thing like that. The policemen were here, and I *told* them that."

"Good-looking, was he?"

"Well . . ." said the pince-nez, "yes, *and* no. He was, well, I guess all of two feet shorter than his wife, and sort of spindly. But he had a fine head of hair, and he had beautiful eyes. Dark, y' know, and sort of sad, and he'd look up at you, like a collie does. Why, it was wonderful. Sylvia, his wife, she got offers to go in the movies, and television, and he didn't want her to, so she passed them all up, and she stayed there, doing that mis'able kind of super's work; she mops the halls, and all. Of course *he* did the real heavy work, before he left in the morning, and when he came home nights."

"Who does the hard work now?" I ask.

"Oh, she's found someone, but they say he's not much good."

A customer came in, and I start to leave pince-nez. But she's got a tag-line that just about knocked me silly.

"And I *told* the police over and over. . . . I said I *knew* Willie would never rob me — and anyhow, I asked them, why would he come back in the middle of the night and *break* the safe, when he had the combination?"

"He did?"

"Yes. He was the *only* one."

"Except you."

"No, I didn't want it. It made me nervous. I was afraid I'd tell it in my sleep, or doodle it on a pad when I was telephoning, you know."

"Sure. I know," I say, and take another look at that face. You're the one leaves her purse in the phone booth, you're the one drops her keys down a grating. You're the one gets locked in an icebox. "Thanks," I say. "Been nice seeing you."

Now, anyhow, I've got something to work on. If this fellow had the combination, he could have got out the money without her noticing. But even she might get suspicious if the safe wasn't broken open. He could've done it that way, to get the heat off him, but it's a hell of a risk for sixty bucks. He could have walked out on that blonde. Hard to believe, but it happens. Maybe he's murdered — and maybe he's shacked up real cosy with another dame. Accident? No. Accidents get found out. He went out to go bowling at Finny's, and Finny says he never showed. And what Finny says, you take. Finny don't look like much — cheap little apartment, wife does all the work, no swell clothes; but he's a big shot, all right. Owns hotels, chain stores, he's in the dope racket; that skinny little wife of his is just a front. He's probably got half a dozen long-stemmed beauties. I got to be careful.

You went up one flight of stairs to the Elite Bowling Alley; the stairs were steep and dirty and stinking, and the Bowling Alley was a punk

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show. But Finny was there, because this was his front; if kind of funny things happened somewhere else, plenty of people could tell you they saw Finny right here. Of course he couldn't be there all the time, with all the things he was running, so I took a chance maybe he'd be out, and I'd find a guy who might sing a little. But Finney was there.

"Well, if it isn't Bassard!" he said. "What gives?"

"Nothing," I say. "I'm just one of those Kinsey reporters."

"This is a bad place to ask questions," Finny says. "You better get traveling, sweetheart."

I did. I hadn't expected much, anyhow, and I go down those stairs as quick as I could, and step in next at the tavern she said he went to once a week for a beer, and the owner, who was doubling for barkeep, looked regular to me. Not scared, not jumpy.

"The cops came around three or four times about Willie," he answered me, after he'd seen my card. "I can't tell you only what I told them. He came in here once a week, maybe once in two weeks. One beer, that was Willie. He never stood anyone a drink, but he got on good with everyone. Cheerful. I never believed that about his cracking a safe. Jeeze, he couldn't crack a flea."

I had six double ryes, and then I went back to my office. When I want to think something out, I put paper clips on my ears — fifteen, maybe twenty. It helps me, when I want to think.

I was beginning to see a lot of angles. I sat there a while, then I brought out a bottle of Bourbon. I gave myself a good shot of it, and then I went out to see that blonde, that Super, Sylvia. I got along to Eleventh Street, and I rang the bell that said "Superintendent." The buzzer clicked, and when I went in, a fellow came out of the back apartment — a sort of Swede he looked, with a lot of yellow hair like Harpo Marx, and yellow eyebrows. He was wearing a sort of football sweater with padded shoulders, and those pleated pants.

"I want to see Mrs. Van Stuyvesant," I say.

"No," says he. "She's resting."

"She'll see me," I said. "Tell her it's Corney Bassard."

"No," says he, but I gave him a shove out of the way and I went in. She's lying on a couch, in what I think they call a negligee, black, it was, and so thin you could see the pinkness of her right through it. She was smoking, in those short, quick, purple puffs.

"Why didn't you telephone, like you said?" she asked.

"Maybe I didn't have a dime," I said. "Or maybe I just wanted to see a super's wife at home. Finished all your chores yet?"

"I don't like you," she said. "I'm not going to hire you after all."

"Oh, I would, if I were you," I said. "I grow on people. You'd be surprised how they cling to me. Now, just one question. What was your

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husband's life insurance company?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know if he even had any. He tried once to talk about it, but I wouldn't let him. I said if he died, I didn't want any pay for it."

"I see!" I say. "What's money, anyhow? Who wants it? Not us, do we?"

"You're not working for me now," she said.

"Then you wouldn't be interested to hear about a clue?" I ask.

She puts out her cigarette and takes another out of the pack she's got beside her. Only the book of matches is empty; she tears it in two and looks at me, sidelong. I'm sitting on the edge of the table, and I give her one good, straight look, then I look all around the room.

"Nice place you got here," I said. That was true. It was a good floor plan, and kind of dark. I liked the way it was fixed up. Green carpet, pink walls, a lamp made like a sort of huge star with a red shade, some pictures on the walls; a big one of a house in Mexico, I guess, with some pale kind of people looking out of all the windows.

"All right," she said. "I'll buy it. Give me a light, and let's hear your clue."

I chucked her a pack of matches. "Wa-ait a minute!" I said. "Wait a minute. Did your husband ever have a plaid cap?"

"No," she said, very short.

"That's too bad," I said. "His initials in it, and all?"

"Where'd you find it?" she asked.

"Down on one of the docks," I said.

She goes on smoking for a while. I get up.

"Wait!" she says. "I've been thinking. He did have a cap like that, but he didn't wear it much."

"Here now?" I asked.

"I don't know," she says. "I just haven't had the heart to go over his things."

"Suppose I take a look?" I say.

"All right," she said, as if she was crying, with her head turned away. "In the bedroom closet."

He didn't have much of a wardrobe, but I went through the pockets of all his things hanging there.

"Cap's not there," I said.

"And you found it — on a dock?" she said. "What does that *mean*?"

"You tell me," I said.

"Are you going to the police?" she asked.

"I'll take another look first," I said, and then I left her.

I went to a dock where I know the watchman, and he let me through. After a while I came back, with a lot of stuff in my hand, some of it dripping wet. You'll know later, I say, when he asks questions. But I got to see the cops first.

I stopped to pick up the cap from a little tailor where I'd left it, then I went to the station, and I showed them what I had. The wallet that had his name and address under a strip of cellophane had got sort of wedged in a girder and it was pretty dry;

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nothing in it but some snaps of his wife and a French franc. The checked cap was wet, but there was a handkerchief tied in a loop, with a lot of blood on it.

"Been used for a gag," I said.

"Nope. A sling," says Captain Canoodler.

You knock a man out, unconscious, maybe dead. You're going to dump him off a dock. But you put a sling on him, so he'll be comfortable. All right. All right. All right. Me, I don't mix it with the precinct captain.

I dictate a list to a cop, he types it, I sign it, Canoodler signs it. We talk a while; he says just what I expect him to say, and I get a few ideas into his head, which is not easy. Then I step in a bar and get a couple of double ryes, and then I get along to the blonde's. It is getting late now, after midnight. I ring the super's bell, and wait. I ring again, and do some more waiting. I didn't figure it would take the blonde long to put on as many clothes as she was apt to wear, but maybe she had curlers in her hair, or greaseless grease on her face, as I can't think of other reasons. Anyhow, I keep my finger on the bell, and after a while the latch clicks and I go in. The Harpo Marx character is standing there, all dressed, in a dark suit, even got a necktie on.

"What d'you want?" he asks.

"I'd like a couple of race horses," I answer. "I'd like a new car. I'd like a yacht, a lot of things. But right now I want to see Mrs. Van Stuyvesant."

"I'm not going to disturb her at this hour."

"Maybe she's up, reading a good book," I say.

"No," he says. "Her lights are all out."

"Where do you live?" I ask.

"I have a room — on the premises," says he.

"In the cellar, maybe," I said. "That's a good place to catch rats."

I saw that the door of her apartment was on the latch, so I give him a shove. One of his big shoulders went sliding down his back, and while he tried to push it back, I got by him, into the apartment. She was standing there, in some sort of long night-gown, pale blue; her feet were bare, and her toenails painted blue, her long blonde hair down to her waist.

"I got information for you," I say.

"Give," she said.

I had a copy of the list of what I'd brought to Canoodler, and I read it to her.

"God!" she said. "Then he was murdered, thrown off the dock."

I lit a cigarette and sat down on the edge of the table. She was crying, but plenty of dames can do that, any time they want. "Then — the case is closed?" she said. "Now they know — he's dead?"

"There's no case," I said.

"But all those things on the dock . . .!"

"They could have been planted," I said.

She gave me one of those sidelong

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looks, and took a cigarette out of a box. This time I gave her a light, her hand was shaking so.

"Anyhow," she said, "now they know — that Willie's dead."

"Nope," I said. "There's no case. No corpse. Nobody to accuse. Nothing to bring into court."

"But . . . !" she said.

"Yeah," I said. "But. The insurance people won't pay off till there's a body."

"But I don't want anything to happen to Willie!" she cried.

"Sure," I said. "But you'd have ten thousand bucks —"

"*Ten!*" she says. "I'd have fifty thousand."

"Well, no," I say. "You'd have ten, sister. You owe me a bill."

"You — rat!" she says. "You —"

"Change the record," I tell her. "I heard that one before. Ten is what you get — if I work for you. Otherwise, you go to jail."

She's puffing on her cigarette, little clouds of purple smoke.

"But . . . !" she says.

"But," I say. "If you want that ten thousand, you can have it. You don't even have to sign a note. You'll pay me when the insurance people pay you. Look how I trust you."

"But I'm *fond* of Willie!" she says.

"Ten thousand bucks worth?"

"I thought we could swing it together," she said, doing some more crying. "Willie knew I wanted — I needed a lot of things, and he thought —"

"Yeah, I know how Willie thought," I said. "But why the hell did you ever marry that poor little shrimp?"

She was really crying now, all right.

"He was — such a gentleman," she said.

I waited a minute, then I said: "Call in your handyman."

She waited a minute, too, then she opened a door to what was probably the bedroom.

"Come here, will you, please, Hans?" she said, and in comes the Harpo Marx character.

"I'm working for Mrs. Van Stuyvesant," I tell him, "and I'd like you to help me pick up some clues."

He looks at her, and she nods her head. So we go out, take him down to a friend's car I borrowed. We get in and drive away. "What's that, over your side of the road?" I ask, and when he turns to look, I give him a rabbit punch, and he's out. The Harpo Marx wig was easy enough to get off, but the eyebrows were pretty hard; they stuck. Well, anyhow, I did it. I had some bits of lead pipe and put them in his pockets, because I did not want him coming up too soon, and I drove down to the dock.

Of course, it is my profession to work for law and order, and if I was not ethical, I would lose my license. So that although the blonde knows it, I am thankful I was able to stop a big fraud from being put over on a life insurance company.

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IN ROUND FIGURES

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

LESTER LEITH ROLLED OVER IN BED and grinned at the ceiling. In the lazy flexing of his well-oiled muscles there was something of the litheness of a stretching panther.

The electric clock on the dresser marked the hour of ten-thirty.

Leith stretched forth a silk-sheathed arm and rang for his valet. Almost instantly a door swung upon silent hinges and a huge form made an awkward bow.

"You rang, sir?"

"My bath, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir."

The door closed as silently as it had opened. But the square-shouldered valet had oozed into the room between the opening and closing of the door. On ponderous tiptoes he set about the tasks of the morning. The bath water roared into the great tub. The clothes closet disclosed an assortment of expensive clothes, from which the heavy hands of the servant picked suitable garments.

Propped up in bed, smoking a cigarette, Lester Leith regarded the man through lazy lidded eyes.

"Scuttle, you remind me of something, but I can't quite place what it is. Do you suppose you could help?"

The coal-black eyes of the valet glinted into smoldering fires of antagonism. He half-turned his head so that Lester Leith might not surprise the expression of enmity on his face.

"No, sir. I've reminded you of so much, sir. First it was of a reincarnated pirate, and you disregarded my real name to call me Scuttle. Then —"

Lester Leith held up a well manicured hand.

"I have it, Scuttle!"

"Yes, sir?"

"A locomotive, Scuttle; a big, black, shiny, powerful locomotive, but running on rubber tires."

"On rubber tires!"

"Quite right, Scuttle. It's the way you have of oozing about the room."

The man straightened. The broad shoulders snapped back. For a quick half-instant the sweeping black mustache bristled with aggressiveness. Then the servant sighed.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. The bath is to be just a little warmer than lukewarm, sir?"

"Quite."

The valet used the pretext to ease his huge body into the bathroom. He closed the door, turned, straightened, and the air of servility evaporated from his personality. His black, beady eyes glittered defiance. His hamlike hand knotted into a fist. For seconds he stood quivering with rage.

Lester Leith, lying back on the bunched pillows, chuckled softly and blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. It was as though he took a fiendish delight in flicking this man on the raw.

The valet took a deep breath, re-

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gained control of himself, shut off the bath and oozed into the bedroom.

"The bath is ready, sir."

Lester Leith yawned, stretched, paused with one pajamaed leg thrust over the edge of the bed.

"Scuttle, how long's it been since we checked the crime clippings?"

A look of eagerness flashed over the heavy face of the giant servant.

"Some time, sir. There have been several interesting crimes recently."

"Crimes the police haven't been able to solve?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you think I'd be interested?"

"I know it, sir."

"Why?"

"Because of the very valuable loot which the police haven't been able to trace yet."

"Tut, tut, Scuttle, how often must I tell you that my interest in crime is purely academic? That's why I never make personal investigations. I only study the reports published in the newspapers. Scuttle, get out the clippings and I'll glance over them."

And Leith slipped from his pajamas and into the lukewarm tub while the valet opened a drawer and thumbed out an assortment of newspaper clippings, dealing with various unsolved crimes. By the time Leith had rubbed himself into a glow, attired himself in faultless flannels, and poured coffee from the electric percolator, the valet had arranged the crime clippings and took up a recital in a husky monotone.

"There was the affair of Mrs. Maybern's diamonds, sir. Missing."

"Robbery?"

"Yes, sir; she had been at a night club, dancing with one of the most attractive . . ."

"Pass it, Scuttle. It's probably blackmail."

"Very well, sir. How about the Greenwell murder?"

"Motive, Scuttle?"

"Robbery and, perhaps, revenge."

"Pass it, Scuttle. Is there, by any chance, a crime with a dash of imagination, with a touch of the bizarre, Scuttle?"

The heavy thumb of the police spy ran through the clippings.

"There's one, sir, but it's a cold trail."

"Tut, tut, Scuttle. You mustn't get the idea I'm seeking to trail these criminals. My interest is purely academic. Let's have the cold trail."

"The Demarest reception, sir."

"Mrs. De Lee Demarest?"

"The same, sir."

"Her reception was quite an affair, Scuttle. Seems to me we received an elaborately engraved invitation, did we not? The body of the invitation was engraved, the name scrolled in by hand. Rather on the ornate side."

"Yes, sir. And you perhaps remember reading of what happened, sir? The gems, the cash, all looted clean — the most carefully planned robbery in the past five years, sir."

Lester Leith poured himself a fresh cup of coffee, creamed and sugared it, lit a fresh cigarette, and sat back in the chair. There was a flickering

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gleam of real interest in his eyes.

"I never read the newspapers, Scuttle. You should know that. The crime news is all that interests me, and I have you to clip that. But a robbery of that nature interests me. It's a wonder our zealous friend Sergeant Ackley didn't suspect me of the job. Being a society robbery, I presume his first thoughts would be of me. And I suppose the robbers were attired in evening clothes, Scuttle?"

Scuttle, the police spy, refrained from telling Leith that he had been suspected of having a hand in that affair, that all that prevented a severe grueling at headquarters was that the police spies could account for every minute of Leith's time on the day in question.

"No, sir, they were not in evening clothes. In fact, it's quite a story."

"Tell it to me, Scuttle."

"It began with a Mrs. Pensonboy Forster —"

"What a ponderous name, Scuttle! She sounds like a mountain of respectability. One feels instantly that one should know Mrs. Pensonboy Forster, yet I don't remember having heard of her."

"Yes, sir," agreed the valet. "That's the very point. It was the name that enabled her to get into the reception."

"Tell me, Scuttle, was she fat?"

"Was she fat? Why, the woman was a mountain! She weighed three hundred and fifty pounds if she weighed an ounce. And she had a cold, fishy eye that sent chills through everyone she looked at."

Lester Leith pushed back the empty coffee cup, blew a smoke ring.

"Scuttle, I am going to like this case. Tell me more."

"Well, sir, you remember the elaborate invitations. They were printed by Garland. That is, the engraving was done by him. The names were lettered in by some artist that Mrs. De Lee Demarest secured. I understand he charged two thousand dollars."

"Never mind the charge, Scuttle. Mrs. Demarest has plenty of money. Give me the facts."

"Well, sir, the invitations were most distinctive. Each guest had one, and the invitation was in the form of a card, to be presented at the entrance. This Mrs. Pensonboy Forster drove up in a magnificent car, was assisted to the ground, sailed up the stairs, and presented an invitation. The police have it now, sir. It seems to be most regular in form, but the lettering of the name shows little distinctive mannerisms which prove it was not done by the artist engaged by Mrs. Demarest."

"In other words, Scuttle, the invitation was a forgery."

"Precisely so, sir. But the woman who presented it was so substantial, so portly, so — er — so fat, sir, that she was admitted without too close a scrutiny of the invitation."

"But how could a three-hundred-and-fifty-pound woman pull a holdup and get away with it? Her escape, Scuttle, would be quite a problem, even for a resourceful brain."

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"She fainted, sir."

"Fainted!"

"Yes, sir. And, of course, there's the key to the whole scheme."

"What are you talking about?"

"The fat woman fainted, and fell downstairs, from the top to the very bottom, sir."

Lester Leith sighed. "What then?"

"Well, sir, you see the reception was in the nature of an announcement party. The daughter of Mrs. Demarest had been married in Europe, and the marriage was kept secret. There was quite a romance."

Lester Leith sighed again, patiently.

The valet flushed.

"It all fits together, if you'll just listen, sir. The marriage was performed in Europe. It was announced at the reception, given in honor of the husband. And there were presents displayed, sir. They were grouped in one of the front rooms and two detectives were employed to watch them. And, of course, the guests wore plenty of gems, sir.

"Therefore, when the woman fainted and fell downstairs, she fell right into the front room where the detectives were guarding the presents. They tried to lift her onto a couch, sir . . . but three hundred and fifty pounds! They just couldn't do it. She was a mountain of flesh, and she groaned frightfully.

"Then there was the clanging of an ambulance gong. Of course, everyone thought one of the other guests had summoned the ambulance, sir. It came to the curb with a big sign on the side: *Proctor & Peabody — Emergency Ambulance.* You know the type of car, sir. But on this one the sign was so big it was almost an advertisement."

Lester Leith nodded.

"They carried this fat woman away in the ambulance, Scuttle?"

The valet shook his head.

"Three stretcher bearers, all clad in white, came into the room. They tried to lift the woman and failed, and they sent out for the driver."

"Then what?"

"Then it happened, sir. The guests were all bunched together. The detectives were bending over the woman, trying to get her on the stretcher. The ambulance men were at very strategic positions. Then the woman sat upright and conked the detectives on the bean!"

"Conked, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. That is, tapped them with a heavy object. In this case it was the barrel of a gun. The detectives went to the mat, sir, and the woman swung the business end of the gun toward the guests. The ambulance men got guns out and herded the guests against the wall. They piled all the jewelry and cash on the stretcher, took the most expensive of the gifts, piled them on the stretcher, loaded the stretcher in the ambulance and all drove away."

Lester Leith sighed, a long drawn sigh of utter satisfaction.

"Scuttle, it is perfect!"

"Yes, sir. The loot was worth two hundred thousand — perhaps more."

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Lester Leith nodded. "Yes, indeed, Scuttle. It would be. Of course, the success of the whole scheme depended on the fat woman. They couldn't lift her. They couldn't do a thing with her. And a fat woman who has fainted is such an awkward thing to handle. A gentleman is supposed to scoop the delicate form of a lady into iron-muscled arms and convey her to a couch. But in this case it would take a block and tackle."

The valet nodded.

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle. It was artistic. I presume they telephoned the police at once, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir, and that's the peculiar part of it, sir. You see the ambulance was distinctive. It couldn't have escaped discovery, sir. It had the sign painted right on its side — a very large sign, almost distastefully large. The police realized at once that the ambulance was the point they should concentrate on. They dispatched police cars to form a cordon about the district; but no ambulance left the district. That's why the police feel certain the ambulance drove into a nearby garage."

Lester Leith nodded. "The police, of course, telephoned Proctor & Peabody — to find out if an ambulance had been stolen?"

"Naturally."

"And found out that none had. The ambulance was a complete imitation all the way through. Right?"

"How did you guess that, sir?"

"Simple, Scuttle. It's as simple as the solution to the whole affair. The police simply failed to see the obvious thing, Scuttle."

The valet teetered back and forth on his large feet.

"You mean to say you have deduced a solution to the crime — that is, a knowledge of the identity of the parties who are guilty — from a mere recital of the facts?"

Leith shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us say, a tentative solution, Scuttle. Now, for instance, the social secretary of Mrs. Demarest?"

"Was instantly suspected of complicity, sir. She was taken to headquarters and grilled. It appears that she had been very careless with the engraved invitations. She'd shown them to several people in advance of mailing, although she had been instructed not to do so. And the list of engraved invitations sent out and those remaining in her hands didn't tally. There were two unaccounted for. She *said* she had spilled ink on them and destroyed them, but didn't tell Mrs. Demarest. She got the artist to fix new ones."

Leith nodded again.

"You think it's the social secretary who's guilty?" asked the undercover man. "The police do. They've let her out, but they're shadowing her."

Lester Leith pursed his lips, blew a smoke ring, traced its perimeter with a well-manicured forefinger.

"Tell me, Scuttle. This social secretary. Is she very thin, perhaps?"

"No, sir. She's rather inclined to beauty of figure, sir. She has wonderful curves, and her eyes are quite ex-

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pressive. She's the sort of a girl the newspapers like to photograph. Her name is Louise Huntington. There's her picture, sir."

Lester Leith stared at the newspaper picture of a beautiful girl. The face was smiling, happy. The well-turned limbs were crossed in such a manner as to show a tantalizing expanse of silken hose.

"Taken before the accusation?"

"So I believe, sir. I understand she was all broken up over the affair. She seems to think she'll never be able to get another position."

"Mrs. Demarest discharged her?"

"Of course, sir. She would, you know."

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle, *she* would."

"Was there anything else about the crime you wished to know, sir?"

Lester Leith did not answer for several minutes. He blew a succession of smoke rings.

"No," he said, at length, "nothing else," and then he chuckled.

"Something amuses you, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle."

"May I ask what it is, sir?"

"Yes, indeed. I was thinking how perfectly ludicrous you would seem teaching a fat woman how to faint."

The valet's mouth opened and closed several times before his tongue got traction on the words that he sought to utter.

"*Me!* Teaching a fat woman how to faint! Good lord, sir, what an idea!"

"It *is* an idea, isn't it, Scuttle? Do you know, I think I should get a deep mattress to place on the floor. Then I'd have her fall over there in the corner."

"But . . . but . . . sir . . . I don't understand. Who is this fat woman, and where do we get her?"

"Ah, Scuttle, there you've placed your finger upon the point I wished to discuss. We advertise for her, of course. I would suggest a more mature woman, one who is about forty years of age, Scuttle. Experience has taught me that women of that age have adjusted themselves to the wear and tear of life. In short, Scuttle, such a woman would be much more likely to wear tights."

"Wear tights, sir!"

"Precisely. I would suggest green tights, particularly if you are able to get a blonde. The advertisement should be worded something like this:

> "*WANTED:* Fair, Fat, and Forty. Good-Natured Woman Who Weighs at Least Three Hundred and Fifty Pounds. Should Know Something About Horses."

"Know something about horses! Have you gone stark, raving crazy, sir?"

"I think not, Scuttle. Evidently you have failed to consider certain elements of the Demarest robbery."

"Yes, sir. Such as?"

"Such as the fact that a woman who weighs three hundred and fifty pounds and deliberately falls downstairs, knowing in advance she won't be hurt, must have had some circus or stage training. Then, when you add the fact that she is rather handy with

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a gun . . . well, Scuttle, the answer is obvious. She has probably done work with a Wild West show."

"I'm not sure I follow you, sir."

"She fainted and fell, Scuttle. Yet they all knew — that is, those on the inside of the scheme — that she wouldn't be hurt."

"How do you reason that, sir?"

"Because the conking of the detectives was an important part of the scheme. The reasonable time to conk them was when they were bending over to assist the lady to a stretcher, and the person who could most effectively start the conking process was the woman herself."

The police spy stroked his mustache with what was intended to be a thoughtfully meditative gesture. But his washboarded forehead and twisted lips gave evidence of deep perplexity.

"And you want to put in an advertisement, get a fat woman?"

"Precisely."

"Because you think the same woman might answer the ad?"

Lester Leith shrugged his shoulders.

The valet pressed the point.

"Yet that's why you mentioned horses. A circus woman would know horses. You must admit that."

Lester Leith smiled.

"Skip along, Scuttle, and insert that want ad. We should start getting replies almost at once."

"But what's the idea of teaching her how to faint?"

"That, Scuttle, is one of the things I must keep absolutely secret. It's between the lady and myself."

"But you don't even know who she is yet . . . Is it that you want to see from the way she acts if she's accustomed to faint? Is that it? A trap?"

Lester Leith glanced at his watch.

"Do you know, Scuttle, there are times when your reasoning powers absolutely surprise me?"

The valet flushed. "Is that so, sir?"

"Absolutely," remarked Lester Leith in a tone of finality. "And, may I add, Scuttle, that this is not one of those times."

Scuttle inserted the ad, but not until he had made an appointment with Sergeant Ackley. Scuttle, known as Beaver on the force, walked from the newspaper offices to find the sergeant, parked in his official red roadster, waiting for him.

"Well, Beaver, you got him working on that Demarest affair. That's fine! We'll tail along and let him lead us to the culprits, if he solves the crime. And then we'll nab both him and them. If he misses fire, nothing will be lost."

Beaver grunted.

"I got him started all right; but no one knows where he'll finish. He gets my goat with his Scuttling me this and his Scuttling me that."

"There, there, Beaver," soothed Ackley. "It won't be but a short time more and then we'll have the goods on him. When we do, you can start in working him over. I promise you fifteen minutes alone in the cell with him. If he resists an officer that'll just be too bad."

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"There won't be enough left of him to arraign in court."

Ackley nodded.

"Now tell me about the set-up," he said, fitting a cigar to his lips with that perfect precision which characterizes a man who is about to enjoy some very welcome information.

"Well, I did just as you told me. When he called for the crime clippings I spoke of a couple of things I knew he wouldn't be interested in, then I pulled that Demarest affair and he fell for it right away. He's got an idea that's very logical, too.

"He says the fat woman had to be a tumbler from a circus, probably a Wild West show, and he pointed out reasons that are ironclad. Then he wants me to insert an ad for a fat woman of about the age of this Mrs. Pensonboy Forster. He says I've got to teach her how to faint."

Sergeant Ackley's lips snapped the cigar to an abrupt angle.

"Teach her how to faint!" he exclaimed through clenched teeth. "What does he want to do that for?"

The undercover man assumed an air of sophisticated wisdom.

"Tut, tut, sergeant. It's simple."

Sergeant Ackley's big hand ripped the cigar from his mouth. He hurled it to the pavement with such force that the wrapper cracked into fragments.

"Where do you get that tut-tut stuff? And what gave you the idea you can drool over me with that air of superiority Leith puts on? Have you been battin' around him so long you think you're one of those masterminds? Because, if you have, I'll bust you so flat you'll make wrapping for a picnic sandwich, you bull-necked, fat-headed, cinder-eyed —"

Beaver made haste to mollify the sergeant.

"No, no. I didn't mean it that way. You got your nerves worked up. What I meant to say was that I've put two and two together from workin' with him so long. Gimme a chance to explain, will you?"

The sergeant took another cigar from his pocket.

"Well, get busy," he growled. "You tut-tut me again and you'll go back to pavements."

"Yes, sergeant, but remember I've lived with that drawling stuff so long I can't help using some of it. It's unconscious . . . but let's look at the case. I gotta be gettin' back. He'll have more fool things for me to do.

"You see, he figures that one of the fat women who answers his ad will be either someone who has had circus experience, or, perhaps, the very one who pulled the faint on the Demarest job."

Sergeant Ackley's lip curled.

"What a boob you are, Beaver. It ain't nothing like that at all. In the first place, they made a good haul on the Demarest job. The woman who pulled that stunt is sittin' pretty right now. She's out of the picture, and as for finding anybody who'd know her and squeal, that's foolish. If any of the profesh knew her they'd have tipped us off by this time.

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"No. It's something else, something deeper. I have an idea he's going to lift the idea and train this fat dame to pull the same stunt for him. It's just the sort of a stunt he'd have thought up. Wonder is that he didn't. Maybe he was back of it all the time."

The spy shook his head. "I'll keep you posted. But it's some funny scheme. Remember, he don't ever rob anybody except thieves. I wish to thunder he'd tip his hand just once! Too bad he smelled out that dictograph we had planted — makes it hard for me to report. But I'll keep you in touch with the situation. How about planting a woman to answer his ad?"

"No. There ain't a woman in the department who could answer the description. All of our lures are the vamping type."

Lester Leith was up early the next morning to receive applications for the position mentioned in his want ad. There were six of them, no more. Some of them were, perhaps, in the three-hundred-pound class, but there were only two who seemed to come anywhere near three hundred and fifty pounds.

Leith made his selection with a judgment that was almost intuitive. He jabbed his forefinger at a woman who stood in a corner.

"Name?"

"Sadie Crane."

"Come in," he said.

The woman was about forty. She weighed well into the three hundreds, yet there was about her a certain feminine attraction. Her figure was wadded with fat, yet gave the suggestion of curves. Her eyes were bright. Her flabby lips twisted in a perpetual smile.

"Side show?" she asked, as soon as she had entered the room where Lester Leith indicated a specially constructed armchair.

The police spy, hovering near the doorway, listened intently.

"Not exactly a side show. You've been in one?"

"Sure. When I started putting on fat I dieted for a while. After I passed two hundred pounds I decided I'd better go the other way and make some money out of it. So I made up for lost time on the sweets . . . and here I am. Been in side shows from Keokuk to breakfast and back."

"Married?"

She shook her head. A tender light came in her eyes. "Widow. I married the Human Skeleton out of Selig's Super Shows. He was at Denver. Poor Jim, he caught cold the second week we'd been married, and he went quick."

Lester Leith bowed his head gravely, silent comment upon the match-like man who had been the love of this mountain of flesh.

"You'd wear tights?"

"No."

Lester Leith gravely regarded the tip of a smoldering cigarette.

"Perhaps your modesty —"

"Modesty, heck!" she interrupted. 'It ain't modesty. I've showed my

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figure from Maine to California, from Mexico to Canada, and I've showed more skin area than any other woman in the world. I'll wear some professional clothes I've got, a jacket and shorts. That's the way I used to sit in the side shows. That's the way I'm willing to work."

Lester Leith nodded.

"That is reasonable. The salary will be twenty-five dollars a day. You will have to learn how to faint."

The fat woman leaned over and looked at Leith earnestly. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Fainting. You'll have to learn to drop over to one side, or flat on your back in a faint. You'll have to learn to take the fall without hurting yourself. We'll have mattresses and sofa pillows to break the fall at first. Later on we'll gradually take them away and you can fall on the floor."

She sighed. "Living around a side show for fifteen years, I've naturally seen lots of freaks — but you're a new type."

"But you're willing?"

"Sure, I'm willing. Only I don't want to take any exercise that's going to get rid of any fat. This fat is my stock in trade. At my present weight I'm an attraction. If I should drop a hundred pounds or so I wouldn't be anything but a fat mommer."

Lester Leith motioned to the valet.

"Will you please explain to the other applicants that their services are not wanted, Scuttle? And you'd better get their names and addresses. That will make them feel better. Tell them the position is temporarily filled."

The valet nodded, took pencil and paper, and oozed through the door.

Lester Leith glanced significantly at the grinning fat girl who reclined in the specially constructed chair.

"You can keep your mouth shut?"

"Like a clam."

"Now is a good time to begin."

"From now on, Mr. Leith, you don't hear anything out of me except clam-talk."

Leith reached for a checkbook.

"I will advance your salary for the first week."

He wrote and signed a check.

"You'll be expected to be available at all times. And I'd prefer to have you keep off the streets. So I've arranged to rent the adjoining apartment. It's all furnished, ready for you to move in. Your living expenses are, of course, to be paid by me."

The fat hand folded along the tinted oblong of paper. The twinkling eyes regarded the figures.

"Two hundred and fifty bucks!"

Lester Leith nodded. "I like round figures."

She caught the point, stretched out her legs and let her eyes drift over her form.

"When that guy with the mustache comes back, get him to give me a pull, and I'll get out of this chair an' go look the apartment over. Better order two quarts of whipping cream and lots of candy. I drink pure cream. Seems to agree with my stomach. The candy I eat for a pick-up. A fat

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person has lots of body to keep fed."

The door opened. The valet appeared with a list of addresses.

"Got them all, Scuttle?"

"All five of them, sir."

"Pass them over. And you might help Mrs. Crane out of the chair."

The undercover man approached the chair, heaved and tugged. Slowly the inertia of the thickly folded flesh was overcome and the woman got her thick legs under the fat body. Her eyes and lips were smiling.

"Cheer up, big boy, you're goin' to have lots of this to do."

"Show Mrs. Crane into the adjoining apartment, Scuttle — and arrange to have half a gallon of whipping cream delivered every day. And order a twenty-five pound case of assorted chocolates."

"Yes, sir."

"And then I'll want a social secretary, Scuttle. I think I'll go into the side-show business — not in a commercial way, but as a social activity."

"That'll be great," beamed Sadie Crane. "Gimme a week an' I can put on twenty pounds. It'll seem good to get back into the game. You goin' to get a human skeleton?"

"Perhaps. Have you any suggestions?"

"I'd like to help pick 'm. Poor Jim was sort of sandy complexioned. If you could find another like him —"

Lester Leith nodded. "You shall have the sole selection."

The woman waddled slowly from the room.

The valet escorted her to the corridor. As he closed the door and indicated her apartment entrance, he leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"Find out just what he wanted?"

The fat woman's lips mouthed a succession of words, but no sound came from the throat.

The police spy puckered his forehead.

"Huh?" he said.

The puffy lips again went through the motions of speaking — silent words that conveyed no intelligence.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

She gurgled a laugh that rippled the folds of her loose garments.

"Clam-talk," she said.

And with ponderous dignity she opened the door of the apartment and side-swayed herself through the entrance.

Lester Leith, stretched before the wide open windows, listened to the distant voice of the city as it droned through the hot afternoon.

"I think, Scuttle, that we'll give Miss Louise Huntington a position. I regard her discharge as being rather an unwarranted act on the part of Mrs. De Lee Demarest. The salary, Scuttle, will be twice her former one. I have asked her to call, in a telegram which I dispatched in your absence."

The valet gulped.

"Think she can tell you anything about the robbery?"

Lester Leith regarded the man with cold eyes.

"I should hardly ask her, Scuttle. There's a knock at the door. You

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might answer it. I believe Miss Huntington is answering the telegram in person."

The police spy regarded his employer with smoldering eyes.

"You've got some clue on that Demarest affair. I believe that slick mind of yours has doped out a solution. You're just sittin' back an' laughin' at the police, and getting ready to hijack the swag —"

"The door, Scuttle!"

The big valet caught himself, gulped, turned and pussyfooted to the outer door.

"Mr. Lester Leith?" asked a remarkably sweet voice.

Lester Leith himself came to the entrance hall and greeted the young woman.

"Miss Huntington?"

"Yes. I received your telegram. I'd like a position most awfully right now, but it's only fair to tell you the police are hounding my footsteps. There was even a shadow following me here."

She was beautiful, both of face and figure, but there was a sad-eyed expression to the face which spoke of recent worries.

Lester Leith smiled. "Please sit down. A police shadow is rather annoying, but not the least bit of an impediment to such activities as you'd have in my employ. Tell me, do you know anything about side shows?"

"Side shows?"

"Yes."

"My gracious! No!"

"That's fine. I always like a social secretary to start with no preconceived notions. Have you, perhaps, a good memory for names?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you recall the names of the invited guests to Mrs. De Lee Demarest's reception?"

"I think so."

"That will be fine. I'd like to have engraved announcements of the side show sent to the same list of names — and there'll be some cards to have printed. *Fattest Human in the World.* And *Skelo, the Human Match.* You understand, Miss Huntington, that the side show would be educational, but quite entertaining. And then I'd want to exhibit the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city."

The late social secretary of Mrs. De Lee Demarest regarded Lester Leith with eyes that were pools of suspicion.

"Are you trying to kid me?"

"No. I am serious."

"Is this job on the level?"

"You are to be the sole judge of that. I shall give you a week's salary in advance. You may quit at any time."

The girl settled back in the chair and crossed her knees in the position in which the newspaper photographer had snapped her. She was beautiful, judged by any standards, and something about Lester Leith's tone caused the sadness of her eyes to vanish into a twinkle of humor.

"If you're on the up-and-up I'm going to like this job," she said.

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"Maybe, after you get to know me better, you'll tell me what it's about."

Leith nodded gravely.

"I am telling you now. I think the Garland Printery will do excellent work on the invitations."

The police spy bent forward, his eyes lighting up.

"The same company that engraved the Demarest invitations!" he blurted.

"The same, Scuttle. Miss Huntington, does the Garland Printery do hand lettering as well as printing and engraving?"

The girl was studying his eyes with eyes that were singularly searching.

"So I understand."

"Very well. You might get in touch with Mr. Garland. You placed your order with him personally in the Demarest affair?"

She nodded assent.

"Your salary is twice what it was in your former position. I'd like to have you take one of the vacant apartments in this building, so you'll be available. I have already made arrangements with the owner. The rent is paid. It's only necessary to select your apartment."

Her voice was tonelessly level.

"There'll be only one key?"

Lester Leith smiled. "At the end of a week you may know me better."

The puzzled eyes swept his face.

"That still won't be very well — a side show, a human skeleton, a fat woman, the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city — are you crazy?"

And then something in the lazy drawl of Lester Leith's voice and in the idea of a side show brought laughter to the lips of the girl.

"I think," she said at length, "I'm beginning to get the idea."

A hot week of dreary monotony passed.

Sadie Crane, attired in vivid silk shorts and a scanty jacket, practiced fainting. She did it with perspiring good nature, the valet looking on, tugging at her arms as she arose from each fall.

Double mattresses were placed in the corner to cushion her falls. The eager eyes of the valet followed her every motion.

Louise Huntington tapped at a typewriter, addressing envelopes. Lester Leith came and went, his comings marked by casual comments of appreciation, his goings marked by police surveillance.

The police found out nothing. The strange routine of the apartment proceeded uninterrupted. The human skeleton, picked by Mrs. Crane, flitted in and out, surveying the tumbling performance with mournful eyes. He spent his evenings squiring the fat woman. Between the two was a fast friendship. He was a chronic pessimist. The woman preserved the unruffled calm of a jovial disposition and an indestructible optimism.

The mattresses became dented with deep furrows where the falling body banged itself a dozen times an hour. The face of the valet became haggard. His surreptitious reports to

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Sergeant Ackley were interspersed with querulous complaint.

The woman achieved skill at falling sidewise, rolling on her back, straightening her muscles and becoming rigid, an immovable mountain of flesh.

"Will you tell me why you're doing that?" asked Arthur Spinner, the human skeleton.

She turned toward him a flushed face on which the sweat had left shining streaks. The clacking of the typewriter in the corner abruptly ceased, proof of the interest of Miss Huntington in the question. Scuttle paused with a handkerchief halfway to his forehead, his ears attuned for the reply.

The fleshy throat convulsed with muscular effort. The smiling fat lips mouthed a silent reply.

"More clam-talk!" rasped the human skeleton.

Sadie Crane laughed. The tapping fingers of the social secretary once more sought the keys, and Scuttle groaned.

It was at that moment that Lester Leith inserted his latchkey, entered the apartment, and surveyed the strange assortment of humanity. His eyes were glinting. In his right hand he carried a black bag.

"Ladeez and gentllllemen!" he intoned. "Step forward and observe the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city. Note the purity and fire of the stones. Note the wonderful workmanship of the clasp. Observe one hundred thousand dollars in scintillating, sparkling, coruscating gleams of imprisoned fire!"

The two freaks crowded forward. The police spy raised himself so that his coal-black eyes could gaze over the heads of the others. Louise Huntington regarded the opened bag with open mouth and wide eyes.

The black bag lay wide open. White cotton backed a necklace which seemed to snatch pure fires from the air and send them out in glittering brilliance.

It was Louise Huntington who broke the silence.

"I'm quitting my job," she said.

Lester Leith arched his eyebrows.

"Personal reasons, or anything that might be remedied by an increase in salary?"

"Personal. If anything should happen to that necklace, I'd go to jail for the rest of my life. The police suspect me of one robbery already — and, of course, there's the added fact that you're as mad as a March hare."

Leith indicated an inner room where he had fitted up a combined den and study.

"Perhaps," he said gravely, "the time has come for us to talk," and he led the girl into the room, and closed the door.

There ensued nothing save the rumble of cautious tones. Scuttle's ear, plastered against the doorknob, heard nothing. Yet the effect of that conversation was magical.

The girl came from the room, smiling, vivacious. She went back to her typewriter with eager fingers. From

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time to time she glanced at Lester Leith as he busied himself with hat, coat, and stick. The moment Leith slammed the corridor doors, the valet pounced upon the typewriting girl.

"What . . ."

She kept her fingers busy on the machine. Her smiling lips parted in a most tantalizing manner, and then she began to form words which carried no sound.

The valet scowled in anger.

"Clam-talk," said the girl, and lowered her eyes to the work in the machine.

The rippling laugh that floated across the room came from Sadie Crane, the "fattest woman in the world."

Two days later the valet spy took it upon himself to question Lester Leith.

"The fat woman faints almost perfectly. I've eliminated the mattress, sir, and she makes — er — perfect landings."

"Very good, Scuttle."

"And what, may I ask, sir, is holding up our — er — circus side show?"

Lester regarded him with judicial gravity, then lowered his voice.

"Scuttle, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, sir."

"Promise?"

"On my word of honor, sir."

"Very well, Scuttle, I am waiting for another ambulance robbery."

"Another ambulance robbery!"

"Precisely. You see, Scuttle, if my theory is correct, there will be another robbery within a few days in which an ambulance will figure. The ambulance will bear a large sign painted upon it, identifying it with Proctor & Peabody. It will make the ambulance so distinctive that it will seem impossible for it to vanish.

"Acting upon that theory, the police will comb the neighborhood in a house-to-house, garage-to-garage canvass. And that's all the good their search will do. The ambulance will have vanished as completely as though it had never existed."

"And then?"

"Then, Scuttle, we'll have our circus side show."

And Lester Leith, possessing himself of a polished cane, hat, and gloves, strolled out for an afternoon constitutional in the park.

The valet, after taking due precautions against being followed, oozed to a drugstore, telephoned Sergeant Ackley, and arranged for an appointment in an out-of-the-way parking station. Here he crawled into the red roadster and unburdened himself of many conjectures, reports, surmises, and facts.

Sergeant Ackley mouthed a cigar with a tempo which gradually increased until he whipped a damp newspaper from the rear of the car.

"Haven't seen the *Record*, have you, Beaver?"

"No, why?"

Sergeant Ackley handed it over. Across the top of the front page was a screaming headline.

Phantom Ambulance Again Figures in Crime.

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"Good gosh!" ejaculated the spy. "How did he dope that out?"

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were narrowed. He spoke with the manner of one who weighs his words carefully.

"He's smarter than the devil, Beaver — there's no getting around that. From the very first time you told him about the Demarest robbery he knew the answer. You can gamble on that. He wouldn't have tied up all that money in the preparation he's making if he hadn't been certain.

"Every time he's worked on a case, he's been able to get something from the newspaper clippings that the police missed completely. I've tried to figure out what it could be this time, but it beats me."

Beaver grunted.

"Well, I've still got the original clippings. I'll sit up tonight and study 'em. And I'll study the account of this last robbery in the *Record*. Maybe I can find out what he had in his mind."

"Think you're brighter than I am, eh, Beaver?"

"No. It ain't that. It's just that I thought maybe —"

"Well, forget it. I've covered that ground thoroughly. But we'll do one thing. We'll start shadowing this guy as though he was studded with diamonds in platinum settings. Eventually he'll lead us to the chaps we want. Then, maybe, we'll hook them for robbery and him for hijacking."

Beaver nodded slowly.

"And there's just a chance I can pump some information out of him. He's been acting sort of confidential lately. Gimme that paper and I'm going to be the one to break the news to him. That'll give me a break. He'll see those headlines, an' maybe he'll talk."

Scuttle was sitting facing the door when Lester Leith returned, and he thrust the folded paper forward before Leith had even deposited his hat and stick.

"There you are, sir."

"Where am I, Scuttle?"

"Right there on the front page. The mysterious ambulance figures in another robbery. This time it was shorter, quicker action. They got away with a bag from a bank messenger. The traffic police were notified by a prearranged signal. But the ambulance disappeared. The police have narrowed it down to a district of not more than forty square blocks. They're making an intensive search of that district."

Lester Leith took the paper from his valet, crumpled it into a ball and tossed it, unread, into the black cavern of the cold fireplace.

"Well, gang, we're ready to start."

"But aren't you interested in the account of the ambulance, sir?"

Leith shook his head.

"Scuttle, cover both depots, find out every train that leaves after ten o'clock this evening and before eleven thirty. Get me a drawing room on each one of those trains where such accommodations are available. You might mention when you get the tickets that they are for a woman

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whose weight is somewhat above the average: Scuttle, I want no slip-up in the reservations."

The valet's eyes glinted with the light that comes into a cat's eyes when the cat hears the faint sound of motion just back of a mouse hole.

"Yes, sir. Where shall I get the tickets to, sir?"

"Any place, Scuttle, just so it's at least four hundred miles away. Pick out various cities, depending upon the direction in which the train's going."

"Yes, sir, but there might be fifteen or twenty such trains, sir. It's the time when most of the crack trains leave."

"I would estimate the number at somewhere around that figure, Scuttle. Please get me a drawing room on each one of the trains."

The valet sighed. "Yes, sir."

"And at precisely nine-two tonight I shall have an errand for you to do, a most important errand."

"Yes, sir?"

"I shall want you to take these diamonds, the best matched necklace in the city, and show them to an artist in order to have a black and white drawing made. I shall want you to take Mrs. Crane with you. I shall want Mrs. Crane to have a suitcase all packed, ready to travel."

Sadie Crane regarded him for a minute with a puzzled frown. But she said no word.

The valet fairly oozed eagerness.

"Yes, sir. Your instructions will be obeyed to the letter. At nine-two, sir? May I ask why you fix that particular minute?"

Lester Leith lit a cigarette, blew a smoke ring.

"Because, Scuttle, that happens to be the exact time I wish you to be at the place I am going to send you."

And Lester Leith walked into his den, stretched himself out in an easy chair, and sent spiraling clouds of blue smoke drifting upward from the end of his cigarette. His eyes followed those twisting spirals of smoke with deep concentration.

Only Louise Huntington, the social secretary, showed no concern or excitement. Her face did not even change expression.

The valet took advantage of the first opportunity to get to a telephone. In a guarded tone he apprised Sergeant Ackley of the latest developments.

"What's this fat woman look like?" asked Ackley. "If she's going to make a trip we'd better be ready to tail her."

The undercover man chuckled.

"She tips the beam at three hundred and fifty. If you can't find that sort of a woman in a drawing room on a train, one of us is crazy."

"Can that line of chatter," snapped Sergeant Ackley, "and remember you're making an official report. We won't try to tail you. You just go wherever he sends you, but contact the office as soon as you can reach a telephone, and keep us posted. Better rush back now — he'll be giving that fat dame secret instructions."

Scuttle laughed again, louder, more jubilantly.

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"Sarge, I've got my rod, and I've got my bracelets. If that lump of tallow can pull anything on me you can start me back to the pavements tomorrow."

It was precisely seventeen minutes after nine o'clock in the evening. Three faces bent over a glittering necklace of diamonds. There was the heavy face of Scuttle, the valet; the jovial, good-natured face of Sadie Crane, the professional fat woman. And, in addition, there was the sharp, keenly thoughtful face of Stanley Garland, sole owner and proprietor of the Garland Printery.

"Well," said Garland, "what's he want done?"

"A black and white drawing," replied Scuttle.

Garland laughed. "I am an engraver. I have been a sign painter. I have done some art work. But will you tell me why any man should think an artist needed a real diamond necklace to copy from? If there is anything that is sketched entirely different from life it is a diamond. After all, my friends, art is mimicry. And when it comes to sketching light, one must use symbols. And a diamond is imprisoned light."

And Stanley Garland stood back and snapped his bony fingers, twisted the little cluster of waxed hairs that adhered to his upper lip, and gazed at his two visitors with obvious superiority.

Scuttle shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"I'm obeyin' orders. He said to take the necklace to you an' get a receipt. He said for the woman to take a few things and put them in a suitcase and be ready to travel. She's taking the ten o'clock Flyer.

"Now if you can put any of that stuff together and make sense out of it you can do more than I can. But the wages I get every month come from this chap, Leith, and when he says do something I do it."

Stanley Garland bristled.

"But I am an artist! I do unique illustrations for place cards. And I take orders from no one. I execute commissions, yes! But orders, *NO!*"

The fat woman placed a round hand upon the shoulder of the irate printer.

"Aw, be a sport! Give him a break."

"And a receipt for the diamonds," reminded Scuttle.

Stanley Garland looked at the diamonds once more.

"Where did he get them? I have heard about this perfectly matched necklace. I did the engraving for the invitations to his side show. But I have heard nothing of the history of this necklace. Who owns it? Where did it come from? What jeweler matched it? Was it purchased or borrowed?"

The undercover man stared gloomily.

"Now, brother, you're askin' real questions. We've had fifty men trying to find out the same thing for ten days, and they haven't uncovered a thing."

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"Humph!" said Stanley Garland.

Sadie Crane waddled her impatient bulk across the office that had been fitted up at one end of the printing establishment. She carried her suitcase in her left hand — a suitcase packed under specific instructions from Lester Leith. It contained her professional costume — the jacket and the silk shorts — nothing else.

She walked to the door that opened into the printery — a door that opened inward. She put the suitcase down on the printery side of this door. Beyond gleamed the polished metal of huge presses, the dim perspective of the darkened printery.

Lester Leith had given her a sketch of the floor plan of the establishment. He seemed perfectly familiar with every detail. How Lester Leith had known these things she did not ask. She understood, generally, that Stanley Garland had a uniform method of impressing customers who called in the evening to consult with him upon important assignments. He had the lighting of the office just so, the dim perspective of the printery showing just so, behind the open door, and he always snapped his fingers and twisted his mustache and proclaimed he was an artist.

Lester Leith had advised her of all these things in detail. It was, of course, possible that he had secured the information from Louise Huntington, who had brought several orders to the office of the printery.

Now Stanley Garland made an exclamation of impatience.

"Take back the diamonds. I will tell him when I see him how foolish he is to send such a model. But you can tell him that, having once seen them, Stanley Garland can make a perfect . . ."

He broke off. There was the sound of a knob upon the outer door, turning very softly, very slowly.

The undercover man shot out a guarding hand to the diamonds.

The outer door swung slowly open.

The white face of Louise Huntington appeared in the crack. Scuttle recognized her, and the hand that had been at his hip relaxed slightly. But the hand that had held the diamond necklace remained in place.

"Hello, dearie!" said roly-poly Sadie Crane.

The girl acknowledged the salutation with a nod.

"Well," snapped Garland, "come in — if you're coming in."

"Are you alone?" asked Scuttle, suspiciously.

She nodded her head, came in, and kicked the door shut behind her. Then her right arm, coming slowly up, disclosed the glint of businesslike, blue steel.

"Those diamonds," she said, "are stolen. Put up your hands!"

Sheer surprise held the figures in that room motionless.

"Stolen!" exclaimed Scuttle.

The girl nodded down the barrel of the shaking gun.

"Don't point that gun this way. You might let it go off," said Scuttle, moving toward her.

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"P-p-put up your hands!" said the girl. "I shall shoot!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Scuttle and took the gun from the quivering hand.

"You fool! You might have killed somebody."

The girl flung herself against his shoulder and began to sob.

"No, no. I couldn't have. The gun wasn't loaded!"

The undercover man snapped back the breech of the weapon, laughed, and tossed it on the table.

"She's right. It wasn't loaded."

Stanley Garland regarded the valet with speculative eyes.

"You are brave, my friend. You advanced in the face of a threatening weapon in the hands of a hysterical woman."

"Bosh!" disclaimed Scuttle. "I've had experience with 'em. She wouldn't have shot, even if the gun had been loaded, but she might have jiggled her hand so bad the trigger got pulled. That was the danger."

"Nevertheless, it was brave."

Scuttle turned to the girl.

"Come on, Louise, kick through. What was the big idea?"

The girl sobbed, straightened, dried her eyes.

"Well, thank God, that's over with," she said.

Scuttle let his beady eyes bore into hers.

"Look here, you didn't think that necklace was stolen at all. You had orders from Lester Leith, now, didn't you?"

The girl hesitated, gulped, and nodded.

"Yes, I did. He told me to take this empty gun, come here and hold you up, on the pretext that the gems were stolen and that I thought you were all accomplices. Then I was to get the gems and go back into the printery . . . and then comes the funny part . . . I was to throw the stones out of the window and hide in the printery until Sergeant Ackley came."

Scuttle stiffened with astonishment.

"Sergeant Ackley!"

"Yes, I was to telephone him just before I came in here, telling him what I was to do. But I wasn't to tell anyone what I had done with the gems. I was to let them search me, and search the printery. I think Mr. Leith wanted Ackley to think the stones were hidden somewhere in the printery, and that I was a thief. I guess he wanted a search made."

Scuttle sat down in a chair.

"I've seen that goof pull some fool schemes, but this is the worst of the lot. You telephoned Ackley?"

"Yes, of course."

"He's coming?"

"He said he'd be here in fifteen minutes."

Sadie Crane glanced at a huge watch that was strapped around her fat wrist.

"I gotta be goin'. I gotta catch that train."

"You got a cab waiting?" asked Louise.

The fat woman nodded. "A special cab with a wide door, dearie."

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"I saw it outside," said the girl in a toneless voice.

"What I don't understand . . ." began Scuttle, and stopped as a cold circle of metal touched his neck.

He rolled his eyes backward, saw the snapping orbs of Stanley Garland, the thin lips, the shrewd features.

"You are a brave man," said Garland, "and I do not take chances with you. Get them up, quickly! And this gun *is* loaded!"

The undercover man read the expression in those snapping eyes, and his hands shot up in the air, instantly, and without hesitation.

The exploring hands of Stanley Garland fished in Scuttle's hip pockets, found the service revolver, the handcuffs.

"Ah!" he purred, "a trap, perhaps. You are a special officer, eh? Well, my special officer, we shall give you a taste of your own medicine. How would you like to feel the bite of your own handcuffs, eh?"

And the printer clicked the handcuffs on Scuttle's wrists. Then he turned to the women — the beautiful social secretary, whose sobs had dried as though by magic, and the professional fat woman who regarded the whole proceeding with bubbling good nature.

"Stay where you are," he said. "A move and you will be dead."

And he scooped up the necklace which had been described as the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city, and darted through the door into the printery. He slammed that door shut, and there was the click of a bolt.

Scuttle regarded his handcuffed wrists in impotent fury.

"Well, of all things!" said Louise Huntington. "Now what do you think of that?"

Sadie Crane looked at her watch.

"I gotta make that train, an' I got to have my shorts an' my jacket. I promised him I would, an' he's been just like a brother to me! And now that sneaky-eyed cuss has gone and locked the door on my suitcase!"

Suddenly the roar of a revolver sounded from the printery. A call for help. That call was in the unmistakable voice of Lester Leith.

Then came the sounds of a struggle, of articles turning over with a crash. Type, piles of paper, chairs, tables, marble slabs, crashed to the floor.

Then — silence.

"If you could just lean against that door right," suggested Scuttle to the three-hundred-and-fifty-pound woman, "I have an idea I could kick the lock and —"

He never finished. The bolt shot back and Lester Leith appeared on the threshold. His clothes were torn. His collar was ripped off. There was dust on his expensive evening suit. His hat was gone.

"What's all this?" he asked.

Scuttle regarded him with black, accusing eyes.

"That's what I want to know."

Lester Leith slumped in a chair. For once his calm control of himself

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and of the situation seemed to have slipped from his grasp.

"I thought Garland was guilty of those Demarest and other ambulance robberies. I got Louise to pretend those gems were stolen, thinking Garland might fall into my trap when he heard the police were coming. I felt I could hide in the printery, watch him as he escaped, and that he might direct me to the hiding place of the Demarest loot.

"It worked like a charm, but when I tried to arrest him, he fought with the skill of a professional. And he had an extra gun on him. I took one away. He had another."

"Mine," admitted Scuttle.

Lester Leith regarded him reproachfully.

"Scuttle, I'm surprised. You shouldn't go around armed. That was where my plans went awry. He had that extra gun. I escaped being shot by a miracle — but, Sadie, you *must* get that train!"

She nodded.

"But my suitcase was locked up in that other room."

"Get it," said Lester Leith, "and get started! If you miss the train, my whole side show will be ruined."

The fat woman waddled toward the printery door.

"Did you really telephone Ackley?" asked Scuttle of Louise Huntington.

She shook her head.

"That was just the story I was to tell."

Scuttle washboarded his forehead.

"This is all too deep for me. But I'll get him right now."

He awkwardly worked the telephone, and got Sergeant Ackley on the wire. While he was talking with the sergeant, Sadie Crane waddled out of the room, her face streaming perspiration with the effort for speed.

Her heavy steps sounded on the short flight of stairs outside the door. Then there was the grinding of gears and her cab rolled away.

It was at that moment Scuttle finished his conversation and dropped the receiver back on the hook.

"There's more to this than appears on the surface," he said, fastening his coal-black eyes on Leith. "Ackley says he had you tailed and you slipped the shadow."

Leith nodded ruefully. He took a cigarette from the torn pocket of his dinner jacket and put it to his lips.

"Admitted, Scuttle. This is one time I made the mistake of actually trying to solve a crime riddle instead of taking only an academic interest in it. Is Sergeant Ackley coming?"

"Right now," snapped the undercover man.

"I'll tell him all about it when he gets here," said Lester Leith. "I'm all out of breath now."

It was but a matter of minutes before the wailing siren of the police car outside was followed by rapid steps, and Sergeant Ackley, at the head of a determined knot of blue-coated men, thrust his way into the room.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

Beaver, the undercover agent,

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winked warningly at his superior.

"Take off these handcuffs and I'll tell my story first," he said.

Sergeant Ackley fitted a key to the cuffs, clicked them open.

"Shoot," he said.

Beaver, still keeping in the character of Scuttle, the valet, told his story; told it from the standpoint of a puzzled servant who didn't know what it was all about, but wanted the police to know the facts.

When he had finished, Sergeant Ackley turned to the social secretary.

"Now you."

The girl hesitated.

"Tell the truth, Louise," said Lester Leith.

"All of it?" she asked.

"All of it," said Lester Leith.

"Well, it started after I got my employment at Mr. Leith's place. Things just didn't seem right, and I was going to quit. Then Mr. Leith told me I was under suspicion in connection with the Demarest affair — which I knew already, of course. And he thought he knew who was really guilty.

"He told me if I would do just as he instructed he felt confident he could trap the criminal into exposing his guilt. Naturally, I agreed to remain on and follow his orders.

"Then, tonight, Mr. Leith told me to take an empty gun, go here and try to hold up Scuttle, telling him the necklace was stolen. He said Scuttle would take the gun away from me, and that I was to be sure and tell him I had notified you to come here and that the circumstances of your coming were such that you'd search the place.

"If Scuttle didn't take the gun away from me, I was to take the diamond necklace, run into the printery, and toss the stones out of the window."

Sergeant Ackley frowned. Scuttle interposed a comment.

"Lester Leith, of course," he said significantly, "being concealed in the printery all the time. When it reached that stage he'd have interfered."

"I didn't know anything about that," said the girl.

Sergeant Ackley nodded his approval.

"Good point, Scuttle. I was just about to make it myself when you interrupted."

The sergeant turned to Lester Leith.

"And now we'll hear your story. It looks very much as though you'd finally stubbed your toe, my supercilious friend."

Leith raised a hand in a gesture of deprecation.

"Tut, tut, my dear sergeant, you *must* learn not to jump at conclusions. Wait until you hear my story. The law requires that a man shall have a hearing before being judged guilty, you know."

"You'll have your chance, fast enough," said Sergeant Ackley, "and just remember that anything you say can be used against you."

Lester Leith nodded, made some

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shift to straighten his torn and rumpled garments.

"You'll pardon my appearance, sergeant?"

"Oh, most certainly," said the sergeant, with an exaggerated air of nicety.

Lester Leith lit a fresh cigarette.

"Thank you, sergeant. You see, I was interested in the Demarest affair. Of course you know of my penchant for studying the newspaper accounts of crime. And the newspaper clippings of the Demarest robbery pointed to what was, at least to my mind, an obvious clue."

Sergeant Ackley hitched well forward in his chair.

"Yes, I thought so. What was the clue?"

"The ambulance, sergeant. You see, the ambulance figured as an integral part of the scheme. It had the words *Proctor & Peabody* painted on it, and everyone agreed that those words were painted quite prominently, too prominently to be in good taste.

"Now Proctor & Peabody run a line of ambulances and of hearses. It is impossible that a car could have their name lettered on it and escape detection. After the Demarest affair the roads were blocked within a given district and all cars within that district subjected to close scrutiny. Yet the ambulance vanished. Now I had a theory about that, but I couldn't be absolutely certain. I determined to wait for a short time and see if the ambulance wasn't used again. It was such a good idea and it worked so easily in the Demarest robbery that I felt certain the criminals would use it again.

"You know the answer. It was used, and most effectively. Once more the ambulance vanished from the face of the earth. But by that time I was certain of my theory.

"You see, the invitation presented by Mrs. Pensonboy Forster when she secured admission to the Demarest affair was forged. The engraving was forged perfectly, but the art work — the hand lettering of each guest's name, added later to the engraved invitation — the lettering showed discrepancies.

"You suspected the social secretary because the forgery of the engraving was so perfect that you felt the invitations must have been left where they would be accessible to the forger. But you overlooked the fact that the lettering was not so faithfully copied.

"Therefore, I came to the conclusion that the person who forged the invitation for Mrs. Pensonboy Forster had had access to the blank engraved invitation, but not to the *completed* invitation. Yet he was an artist or he wouldn't have drawn in the name as cleverly as he did.

"And the ambulance affair also pointed to an artist. You see, sergeant, an ambulance legitimately bearing the name of *Proctor & Peabody*, displayed quite prominently, could never have escaped detection. But a signpainter-artist could easily have lettered the name on flexible

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curtains which could have been adjusted to a specially-made delivery truck, and made it look like an ambulance.

"The curtains could be snapped on, and the truck changed into an ambulance. They could instantly have been taken off, and the "ambulance" would revert to a commercial truck.

"That suggested a business establishment with a light delivery truck. It suggested a criminal with access to engraving facilities, with access to the Demarest invitations. It suggested a criminal who was also an artist and a sign painter.

"You see, now, sergeant, how the finger of suspicion pointed to Stanley Garland. He had but to fill in an extra, blank invitation with some of his own hand lettering, and his accomplice was passed into the Demarest reception. The rest was easy. His accomplices could be men who were actually employed in the printery. They changed the truck into an ambulance, looted the place, changed the ambulance back into a truck, and went through the police cordon with no difficulty whatever. The police recognized the truck with the sign of the Garland Printery upon it, and raised not so much as a question."

Sergeant Ackley heaved a great sigh.

"It sounds reasonable," he admitted . . . "and yet it's so obvious, why didn't we think of that? Go on."

The clubman shrugged his shoulders.

"The rest was easy, sergeant, too easy. I secured some kunzite made into a necklace. That stone has almost as much fire as a diamond. Against white cotton it will fool anyone who is not an expert. By a process of suggestion I made everyone think it was a very valuable diamond necklace. Then I had my valet bring it to Garland.

"I knew he would be tempted. So I arranged to speed up the affair a bit. I had Louise Huntington come in with an empty gun and claim the necklace was stolen, that she had the police on the way. And I primed her with a story to tell, after Scuttle had taken the gun away from her, that would appeal to the ears of Garland alone.

"It was a story that sounded foolish unless its object had been to make the police enter the place to search the printery. Of course, Garland saw the scheme immediately. He thought I was onto him, and that the police were on the way. He had to get away rapidly and take what loot he could with him, so he decided he might as well take this well-matched diamond necklace too.

"I, of course, was waiting in the printery, watching and listening, and I was armed. I waited until Garland had come into the place, had rushed to his secret hiding place, had given unmistakable proof of his guilt, and then I tried to arrest him.

"I made him throw up his hands. And then, when I had taken his gun away from him, he surprised me. He

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had a second weapon on him, one that, it now appears, he had taken away from my valet, Scuttle.

"He surprised me with that weapon. We struggled. He overpowered me and made his escape with the kunzite necklace and the cream of the loot from the Demarest affair. But I have no doubt he had to leave a lot of his plunder. We might look, sergeant?"

The sergeant was on his feet.

"Come on, men. Take Leith with us. See that he has no chance to escape. I'm not entirely satisfied yet."

They entered the printery, found a light switch, flooded the shop with light, and, instantly, the correctness of Leith's reasoning was disclosed.

There was a secret panel in the wall. Inside it was a motley collection. There were rolled curtains of some fabrikoid material which were arranged with snaps to be fastened onto the side of a car. They bore in big letters *Proctor & Peabody*. There were gems, quantities of gold settings, and some coin. There remained none of the better class of stones or any of the currency. It appeared as though someone had scooped out about as much as could conveniently be carried.

Sergeant Ackley surveyed the secret hiding place, checked through the plunder which remained.

"It's the stolen stuff all right," he admitted. "There's around fifty thousand dollars of bulky stuff here. The man must have escaped with around two hundred thousand dollars, in round figures, if we count both the currency and the stones together."

Leith nodded.

"Too bad he got away," he said.

Sergeant Ackley looked at the clubman long and earnestly. He stroked the angle of his jaw with a spade-like thumbnail, and the gray stubble gave forth little rasping noises.

"If your plan had worked, you'd have had him cornered here in the printery," he said.

Lester Leith nodded.

"And he'd have had about two hundred thousand dollars on him. And you two men would have been here alone."

Leith shrugged his shoulders. "Until I could have summoned the police, of course."

"Of course!" echoed Sergeant Ackley, and there was no attempt to disguise the sarcasm of his voice. "And we have been on your trail for a year as a hijacker. Now suppose you had made the arrest and then signified to Garland that he could escape if he left the loot behind. And then suppose you had ruffled yourself all up and claimed you'd been in a struggle, *and* told the same story you now tell. You'd be just two hundred thousand dollars to the good."

Lester Leith smiled faintly. "You wouldn't accuse me of a crime in the presence of witnesses unless you had some ground for the accusation."

"Certainly," agreed the officer, his voice still dripping sarcasm. "I wouldn't think of it for a moment. I was only mentioning that if the circumstances had been different, and if

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you had told the same story you now tell, the circumstances would appear the same as we now have them.

"Under the circumstances, I think I'll make a complete search of your person, Leith, and I'll have my men go through this printery with a fine-tooth comb, looking for a concealed package somewhere."

"Certainly," said Leith, repeating the word and tone of the officer. "I would like you to do that so I would be relieved of any suspicion."

They searched him, and they found nothing. They searched the printery and they found nothing, and then there came a wild exclamation from the undercover man.

"Good God! The fat girl! She took the Flyer!"

Ackley frowned at him.

"Spill it, quick!"

"And her suitcase was in the printery! If she'd set it down there, and then Garland had locked the door and gone to his hiding place, and Leith had hijacked the stolen gems from him, and simply put them in the fat girl's suitcase, and the fat girl had gone to the train, she wouldn't have ever suspected the contents of the suitcase until . . ."

Sergeant Ackley gave a bellow of inarticulate rage.

"Get to the telephone! The idea of letting anything like that go on under your nose!"

"I was handcuffed," reminded Scuttle.

"Seems to me," remarked Lester Leith, "that, for a valet, you show a most official and officious type of mind. I'm afraid you might instill a suspicion into the head of our dear but overzealous sergeant."

"Suspicion, hell!" yelled Ackley. "It's a certainty. Here, let me at that telephone."

He grabbed the instrument and began to throw out a dragnet. The Flyer left at ten o'clock. He assigned men to cover the depot, the gatemen, the taxicabs, and soon the reports began to filter in.

The telephone announced that special officers, covering the train, had reported a very fat woman who had held a ticket to a drawing room. She was carrying a suitcase, and the suitcase was constantly in her hand. She had been escorted aboard the train with difficulty, the suitcase with her. She had almost jammed in the door of the drawing room. It had taken assistance to get her in.

Sergeant Ackley got into immediate action. He ordered the arrest of the woman at a suburban stop where the Flyer was scheduled to make its last stop for through passengers.

Lester Leith gazed at him reproachfully.

"If you arrest that woman you will be responsible for a grave injustice and subject yourself to a suit for false arrest," he said.

"You admit you purchased the ticket on which she's traveling?" asked Ackley, his eye on Scuttle.

Lester Leith clamped his lips shut.

"You have accused me of a crime. I could explain this whole affair in a

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few words. As it is, I shall say nothing until I have counsel present. But I want the witnesses to remember that I warned you against arresting this woman."

Sergeant Ackley's only comment was a sneer of triumph.

"You came so close to getting away with it, no wonder you're sore. If I hadn't thought of that fat woman, you'd have pulled one of the slickest jobs of all time."

Ten minutes passed. The telephone shrilled its summons. A report came in from the suburban town. They had caught the train, arrested the woman, taken her from the drawing room. The suitcase she carried had been opened. It contained a green silk jacket and some shorts, rather a skimpy costume for a fat woman in a side show.

Ackley chewed a cigar meditatively.

"Have men stay on the train and search every inch of the drawing room. Bring the woman to the central station. I'll meet you there."

He turned and glowered about him.

"This party's going to adjourn," he said.

They went to the central station. After an hour a police car arrived with an angry fat woman. She was taken to a cell. Sergeant Ackley gave her a third degree. The woman told a straightforward story. She had never seen Lester Leith but twice in her life — once when she went to his office in response to a want ad, once when he had called upon her with a suitcase and a railroad reservation and employed her to take the suitcase on the train to the destination of the ticket.

She refused to admit she had been previously employed by Leith, or that his valet had taught her to fall in a faint; she denied ever having been in a side show.

Ackley called in Beaver to confront her.

It needed but a glance at the goggle eyes of the undercover man to give Ackley his answer.

"That's not the one. I never saw her before. . . . Yes I did, too. She was one of the unsuccessful applicants for the job Sadie Crane got."

Ackley's jaw sagged.

"Then . . . she doesn't even look like the other?"

"No. This one is blonde. The other was brunette. This one has black eyes, the other had hazel eyes. They're both fat — that's all."

"And because I didn't ask for a description I presume I'll be on the carpet," groaned Ackley.

They went back to the room where Lester Leith was being held.

"Where's Sadie Crane?" rasped Ackley.

Leith blew a cloud of smoke in a lazy spiral.

"I'm sure I wouldn't tell you."

Beaver spoke up again.

"He had fifteen drawing-room reservations on night trains. Maybe she went on one of those other reservations."

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Ackley exploded into action.

"Beaver, you have the most infuriating habit of withholding important information!" he yelled, and got busy once more on the telephone.

Investigation disclosed a startling fact. Five of Leith's drawing-room reservations had been filled. Each one with a woman of astonishingly ample proportions, each woman with a suitcase which never left her hand.

It was a stupendous job to intercept each train and interview each woman, search each suitcase — chartered airplanes, long-distance telephone calls, emergency stop signals on various railroads . . .

By morning several facts were apparent.

The railroad systems out of the city had been badly confused by a wholesale stopping of limited trains at various points en route. Five fat women had been taken from trains to automobiles. They were all yelling vehement threats of lawsuits. Five suitcases had been confiscated. Each suitcase contained exactly the same thing — a pair of green trunks and a jacket.

Sergeant Ackley finally threw up his hands in disgust.

He had disrupted railroads, irritated powerful officials. He had done it all on a suspicion alone, and he had subjected himself to several suits by irate fat women who, as Lester Leith pointed out, were more inconvenienced at being jammed into police automobiles than were thin women.

Also, as Lester Leith managed to point out, Ackley had done virtually nothing toward apprehending the man, Garland, who had escaped; nor had he acted diligently in rounding up Garland's accomplices.

By the time Ackley had turned his attention to that angle of the case, the accomplices had vanished. There remained for him nothing but the glory of having solved the Demarest robbery, and he took unto himself every bit of that glory.

Three days later Ackley received a hurried call from Beaver.

"The apartment where Sadie Crane lived is occupied. No one knows who's in it, but the milkman delivers three quarts of whipping cream every day."

Sergeant Ackley gripped the receiver until the skin over his knuckles was pale.

"I'm coming right over," he said.

"Leith is in his apartment," cautioned Beaver.

"Keep him there," roared Ackley, and slammed down the telephone.

He made record time to Leith's apartment house.

A hammering on the door of the apartment where Sadie Crane had lived was answered by a thin wisp of a man.

"Who are you?" demanded Ackley.

"I'm Spinner."

"What are you doing here?"

"I married Sadie Crane."

"Where's your wife now?"

"In the sitting room, the last I saw of her."

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"Here?"

"Yes, sir."

Sergeant Ackley picked the thin little man up bodily by the coat collar, set him to one side, and strode into the apartment.

He came to a spacious room, in the center of which, sitting in a specially made armchair, cheerfully knitting, was a mountain of flesh.

"You Sadie Crane?" he yelled.

She shook her head.

"Who are you, then?"

"Sadie Crane Spinner. I married Arthur Spinner yesterday."

Sergeant Ackley took a deep breath, controlled the outburst that quivered on his lips.

"You were at the Garland Printery the night Scuttle was there?"

"Oh, yes."

"You were to take the Flyer?"

"Yes, indeed."

"At the request of Lester Leith?"

"Yes. He wanted me to take a suitcase with my things in it and put on a performance in some suburban town."

"But you changed your plans at the last minute?"

"Oh, yes. You see, when I left the printery to take a cab to the depot, the cabbie had a note that had just been delivered. It was from Leith telling me not to catch the train. He'd changed his mind. He said to take the suitcase up to his apartment and leave it there and go back to my apartment and wait until I heard from him. So I did it. It suited me — I don't like to ride on trains. The berths ain't big enough."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were bulging.

"You came here, and have been here all the time?"

"Certainly. Then I got married and had to give up the idea of traveling. I've got to take care of Arthur."

"And your suitcase? What became of it?"

"Oh, Mr. Leith brought it back here the next morning. He said he'd changed his plans."

Sergeant Ackley fitted the mental picture puzzle together.

"What was in the suitcase when he returned it?"

"My trunks and jacket."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"What are you doing now?"

"On my honeymoon. Times are good. Lester Leith employed me at twenty-five dollars a day as a human elephant, my husband at the same figure as a walking skeleton. When his side show blew up he gave us a month's pay in lieu of notice; and the apartment's rented until the middle of the month and the rent paid. So we're staying on here."

"Well," remarked Sergeant Ackley, "I'm a cock-eyed —"

The woman nodded cheerfully.

Sergeant Ackley strode into the apartment of Lester Leith. Scuttle let him in, flashed him a look of inquiry.

Ackley walked to the chair where Lester Leith was blowing spirals of cigarette smoke.

"Pretty clever, sending a woman to

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the only place I'd never look for her — *right back to her own apartment.* I covered every train, arrested five fat women who were false alarms, covered every hotel and rooming house — and here she was all the time!"

Lester Leith shrugged.

"Of course. That's where she *would* be if I were innocent of the crime you accused me of. But you thought I was guilty, so you looked in all the wrong places."

Sergeant Ackley's hands clenched.

"And you had only to take the loot from Garland, slip it in Sadie Crane's suitcase, have her take it out of the printery for you, then come to *this* apartment — take it out right under our noses — and you cleaned up two hundred thousand dollars!"

Lester Leith coughed deprecatingly. "You wouldn't want to accuse me of a crime without proof."

"Two — hundred — thousand — dollars!"

Leith traced the perimeter of a smoke ring with his forefinger.

"And even if you had proof, you couldn't convict me of any crime."

"Why not?"

"Because any package which *might* have contained any loot would have also had my kunzite necklace mingled with it, and it's no crime to recover your own stolen property. If any other property should have happened to be mingled with it, that would come under the legal head of commingled personal property."

Sergeant Ackley scraped his jaw with his thumbnail.

"I'll — be —"

"You will if you use profanity," interrupted Lester Leith.

But Sergeant Ackley had already stormed to the door. . . .

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THE PIGEON WOMAN

by Q. PATRICK

CONNIE WEBBER WAS CRAZY ABOUT the pigeons in the square. It was a joke that never grew stale at Mazzoli's Restaurant — the joke about Connie and the pigeons. Rosa and Shirley, the two other waitresses, who were much younger and who, in a less easy-going establishment, would have treated her with more respect, were kidding her all day long.

"Say, Rosa, think we could sell a piece to Ripley about Connie and her feathered friends? A hundred birds and a girl."

"Hey, Connie, why don't you buy a coupla ostrich fans and give us a dove act?"

Their young friendly laughter would ring about the crowded little Greenwich Village restaurant, and the regular customers, who were in on the joke, would grin at Connie or pat her broad hip as she passed with a tray piled high with empty spaghetti dishes.

Sometimes even Mr. Mazzoli himself would emerge from his kitchen, his olive, sweat-shiny face impish under the cocked chef's cap.

"Connie mia, you catcha me a coupla dem birds and I make-a the fine *piccione alla cacciatore*?"

That was always good for a gale of laughter.

But Connie didn't mind being kidded. She was a big blonde with a big smile and a big heart who liked nothing better than a good laugh. She knew they were all fond of her, especially Mr. Mazzoli who was always threatening to marry her once the restaurant was established and he could find enough time to get out of his kitchen and take her to City Hall. She wasn't even surprised that they thought her comical. It *was* kind of crazy — a grown woman of forty-one feeling the way she felt about a bunch of birds. But there it was.

Whenever she got a chance — in the afternoons, for example, when the lunches were over and before the early dinners started to trickle in — she would slip out to the little shabby square and sit on a bench, watching the pigeons swirl and gleam across the bright sky. Instantly, she would be up with them, flashing, tumbling dizzily in the air. Then one of them would spot her and they would all plunge down for the scraps she always brought from the restaurant — plunge with a clatter of wings, an eager craning of iridescent necks and a regular symphony of coos.

They made Connie laugh with pleasure.

Everyone who frequented the square knew Connie. Even the precinct cops — Fred Kitner, Frank O'Mulligan, Sergeant Connors — all of them paused to chat with her when they passed her feeding the pigeons. She was just naturally friendly, and

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her friendliness was wide enough to embrace not only the pigeons but the whole of Manhattan Island.

It was through the pigeons that Connie first met Yo Yonson. Yo Yonson wasn't really his name. Later she learned it was Erling Something-or-Other, and he was a Norwegian sailor off a ship. But the moment she saw him one spring afternoon shambling through the square like a great blond bear, she said to herself: Look at that big Swede. She remembered the old vaudeville number, *My name is Yo Yonson, I come from Wisconsin.* And the name stuck in her mind.

She would, of course, have noticed Yo Yonson even if it hadn't been for the pigeons. He was so big, for one thing. And so shabby. His pants had been patched at least a dozen times with neat, sailor-like stitches, and his jacket looked almost as if it had once been a tuxedo jacket. There was a hole under one elbow. He was unshaven too, and there was so much unshaven cheek that it would have seemed like a great forest to a fly.

But all those things were just facts that Connie would have noticed about anyone. What really won her was his smile. It wasn't a very clever smile, maybe, but, as he paused to look down at the pigeons clucking and pecking at the scraps around her, it came — sudden, white, infinitely tender.

He stopped right in front of her, watching the pigeons as if they were diamonds or maybe little children. One of his great hands went out toward them and then dropped.

"Here." She smiled impulsively. "Like to try?"

She fumbled in her brown paper bag and held out to him a crust of black Italian bread. He took it like a kid receiving a present. He stooped down and held the crust out cautiously toward the pigeons. One of them cocked its head, made a swift peck, and grabbed the bread away. Yo Yonson pulled his hand back with startled swiftness.

Then he caught Connie's eye and they both broke into delighted laughter.

After that, Connie saw Yo Yonson every day in the square. He would come at exactly four o'clock and now he had a brown paper bag of his own. He was invariably dressed in the same rags, but they were always clean and always neat, except for the hole under the right elbow of his jacket. The ritual was always the same, too. He would pause at the bench next to hers and give her his shy, tentative smile, as if the pigeons were her possessions and he was asking her permission to visit with them. She would smile back. He would sit down then, rip open his bag of scraps, and leave it spread across his great knees like a tray. When the pigeons alighted around him, with a dry rustle of feathers, he would sit still as a statue so as not to frighten them. Soon they would be all over him, pecking in his lap, perching on his huge shoulders. Sometimes one of them would even rest a moment, wabbling slightly, on the top of his blond head.

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His innocent delight in the birds enchanted Connie. Why, he loves them even more than I do, she thought. Sometimes she would try to speak to him, just to be sociable, but he didn't say much and what he did say was hard to understand, though always polite.

It didn't take the Mazzoli Restaurant long to find out about Yo Yonson. On the second day, Shirley saw him sitting on the bench next to Connie and that evening the restaurant was loud with a brand-new series of pigeon jokes.

"The pigeon-woman's found a pigeon-man."

"Say, Connie, why don't you ditch Mr. Mazzoli, marry your pigeon-man, and set up in a menagerie?"

Even Sergeant Connors and Fred Kitner, in for a plate of spaghetti before going on duty, joined in the gag.

Connie just laughed and kidded back with them. But she was glad about Yo Yonson. Not because he was a man — nothing like that. Connie liked her men dark and quick and cheerful — like Mr. Mazzoli. But it made her glow to think of all that affection Yo Yonson felt for the birds. Maybe he was simple — not so bright in the head. But the world needed kindness. There couldn't be too much kindness, Connie thought, not ever in a million years. There could never be enough.

She wondered where Yo Yonson lived. She hoped there was someone who was kind to him and saw that he got enough to eat.

Connie had every second Saturday evening off. One Saturday, about a month after she had met Yo Yonson, she left the restaurant just before five. She figured maybe she would go uptown and take in a show. As she strolled through the square, the afternoon sunlight, slanting down across the benches and the seedy city trees, made it all as pretty as a picture. Yo Yonson was there. He had just finished feeding the pigeons which were up again, darting and spinning in the sky. When he saw her, he rose, hurriedly brushing crumbs from his pants. The smile came as usual, but it seemed shyer, more excited, and his huge head was bobbing to and fro as if he was making an effort to think out the right words to say something.

Connie paused and smiled back at him encouragingly.

At last he managed, in his deep, guttural voice:

"Pliz? My house. You come? Pliz?"

He turned and pointed across the square toward one of the shabby apartment brownstones.

"My house? A little time — pliz?"

His eagerness was as touching as his first cautious holding-out of the crust to the pigeons. The smile had gone, giving way to an agonized fear that she might not understand. No one, not even a little child, could be afraid of him — for all of his bulk.

"Why, of course I'll come." Connie almost added *Yo Yonson* and felt a tickle of amusement in her throat at her own foolishness.

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The house where Yo Yonson lived was the most squalid in the block. The paint was peeling off the window frames. A slatternly woman was sitting on the dirty steps and above, at one of the upper windows, another woman with bright auburn hair was gazing at the street, stolidly chewing gum. When she saw Yo Yonson and Connie, she grinned and yelled down at Yo Yonson: "Hey, moron, gonna give her some of that junk you tried to give me?" She laughed a loud, brassy laugh. The sour woman on the steps peered at them in prickly silence.

Connie was smarting with indignation against the slut of a woman at the window. But Yo Yonson did not seem to have heard, or at least didn't seem to have understood. Wreathed in smiles, he stood at the head of a steep iron ladder which led down into an areaway. He gave a little bow indicating that she should precede him.

Where he lived was a cellar — an honest-to-goodness cellar. The only light seeped in from a small window just about at street level. It was damp, too. But he had it clean and shipshape as a boat-deck. There wasn't any real furniture. Wooden orange crates had been put out for chairs, and an old mattress on the floor was the bed. Stacked precisely against the walls were cartons and cartons of junk. Some of the boxes had chipped cups and plates in them; some had pieces of iron; others were full of old nails, all neatly hammered straight again. There were piles of wood and rags and old newspapers.

So that's how he earns his living, she thought. Going around collecting junk from ashcans at night and then selling it to the dealers. It's a shame, she thought, and this is the United States where everyone's supposed to have rights and earn enough for a decent meal.

Yo Yonson was still smiling happily. He gestured to one of the crates and she sat down. Then he went way back into the darkest part of the room and seemed to be searching through the cartons. Soon she heard him give a little grunt of satisfaction. He came back to her. His big arms were stretched out in front of him and, delicately draped over them, was a long black dress with black artificial lace around the collar and cuffs.

He held it out to her. His smile was unsure again. When she did not take it, he gripped it around the neck part and held it out to her, pointing at the label inside. In the dim light, Connie could just make out the name of a department store.

"Good!" he said. "From big, big store. In the junk can." He nodded vigorously, pushing the dress at her, almost smothering her with it. "Good. From big store. For you."

Connie took it and, rising, held it up in front of her. It was much too small for her; there was a rusty brown stain on one of the sleeves which showed why it had been thrown out; and personally she preferred a more colorful dress. But she knew he was paying her back for the pigeons, and suddenly she wanted to cry. She

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smiled up at him brilliantly, patting the material, making little exclamations.

"Why, it's lovely! It's beautiful! You shouldn't . . . Oh, thank you. Thank you so much."

His answering smile spread right across his face. "You like?"

Then he looked embarrassed, and the blood flooded into his unshaven cheeks. Stiffly, almost with the grandeur of a duke, he bowed toward the door. He was telling her that she didn't have to stay any longer just to be polite or to show she was grateful.

Clutching the dress, Connie hurried out and climbed the area steps. The slut was still at the upper window. Connie jerked her thumb contemptuously at her.

But she didn't really feel angry, not even against that cruel, stupid woman. She felt the way she felt when the pigeons were soaring and swooping against the blue spring sky. She didn't go to the show. She took the dress home and tried it on. It was much too small for her large, solid body, but that didn't make any difference. All evening it warmed her little furnished room, as if it were an expensive electric heater.

Because the whole episode had seemed so beautiful to her, she told them all about it at the restaurant the next day. It never occurred to her to keep it to herself. Nor did it occur to her that the reactions of her friends would be so violent.

Rosa said: "You went there — right there in his place? Connie, how could you? Gives me the creeps just to think of it!"

Shirley said: "He could have murdered you right there and then. That's what he could have done!"

But Mr. Mazzoli was the most concerned of all. He harangued her ferociously in the hot, richly-smelling kitchen, all the time stirring a *parmigiana* sauce.

"Connie, you crazy? That's a crazy man. That's a loco. Guy like that ain't got no brains — is like-a the animals in the zoo. He grab you. One big fist — he grab you. Connie, you crazy! Better I take-a you quick to City Hall and stoppa all this foolishness."

He tried to make Connie promise she would have nothing to do with Yo Yonson ever again. But she wasn't married to Mr. Mazzoli yet and she wouldn't listen. Not that she was mad with him or with the girls. She knew they weren't being unkind to Yo Yonson. They were just saying what they thought was right for her. They didn't know the Big Swede. They hadn't seen his sweet, clumsy smile when he held the crust out to the pigeons.

It was two days later when it happened.

Around eleven o'clock, the last diners had gone and all the tables had been cleared off. Connie said good night to Mr. Mazzoli, who still had hours of work ahead of him in his kitchen, and left Rosa and Shirley at the door because they always went off in the other direction to get a downtown bus. From the very first mo-

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ment that she stepped out into the dimly-lit square, she could tell something was wrong. It was kind of in the air. Then she heard the murmuring voices and made out the small crowd which was gathered around a house on the north side of the square. She hurried toward the disturbance and, as she did so, she realized that the center of the chattering, excited throng was the house where Yo Yonson lived.

"*Murder!*"

She heard the word instantly, passed from one shadowy face to another. A woman standing next to her turned to her eagerly.

"You heard? A woman's been murdered. Second floor front. No better than she ought, they say. Strangled, she was. Strangled with her neck snapped clean in two. And you know something? Her hair was pulled out. Great chunks of it — pulled out, lying there on the floor."

Second floor front. That would be the one with the dyed auburn hair. The dyed hair! Connie felt a twinge of horror and sympathy. Murdered! The poor soul! People were running up and down the steps into the house. Conspicuous among them was the sour-looking woman who had been sitting there the day Yo Yonson had given her the dress. Soon Sergeant Connors and Fred Kitner arrived. All the people on the steps crushed around them, but they pushed their way inside. A little later, more important policemen and detectives swung up in a car. They went inside too.

Gossip was tossed from person to person in the constantly increasing crowd. Just as Connie was turning to leave, the woman next to her grabbed her arm.

"Hear that? There's an idiot that lives here. Some kind of a big Swede. She was always kidding him, they say. And that's the way they go — they have spells on them when they kill. It's the Big Swede that did it, the moron . . ."

Connie felt her heart turn over. All around her now she could hear voices whispering: *the moron . . . the Big Swede . . .*

The avidity, the cruelty in the atmosphere was choking her. They couldn't say that! Not about Yo Yonson — Yo Yonson who loved the pigeons, who couldn't hurt a fly.

Sergeant Connors was coming out of the house. The sour woman jumped at him crying:

"The moron! It's the moron! The Big Swede. Get the moron!"

Sergeant Connors, his normally cheerful red face heavy and flustered, managed to break through to the street. But the onlookers had taken up the refrain.

"*The Big Swede . . . The moron . . .*

Then to the left of the crowd there was a murmuring. It came closer, growing in strength, until it was a gasp of excitement. Everyone lurched to the left. As Connie was jostled along with the others, she felt sick and frightened, but mostly she felt furiously angry. How could people be like this? How could they judge and

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condemn before they were sure, absolutely sure?

An eccentric current in the throng shoved her to the front. She saw then what it was that had caused the commotion.

Yo Yonson had come around the corner into the square. He was pushing a little cart made out of a big crate on old bicycle wheels. The crate was filled with junk and he was standing behind it, huge, shabby, gazing back bewildered at the hostile group in front of him.

Connie wanted to run to him, to protect him. But something about him checked not only her but the rest of the crowd. It was a kind of dignity in the way he held his unshaven head, the way his great fingers curved firmly around the handles of his cart.

The crowd stood still. Yo Yonson stood still. There was a complete silence, but it lasted only a second. Then someone yelled:

"Get the moron!"

A rock was thrown. It landed with a clatter in Yo Yonson's cart.

It was then that Sergeant Connors and Fred Kitner broke through. Before a riot could start, they had whisked Yo Yonson away in a police car.

Connie did not have to stop and think what to do. It was as clear to her as an order from a customer in the restaurant. Those wicked people! They would hound Yo Yonson into the electric chair. Just because he was different — that was all they needed. They'd never bothered to get to know him, to find out how kind he was, how innocent, how much he wanted to be friendly. Oh, no, he was different — so, hound him, destroy him.

They would lie, too. Connie knew that. The stringy woman with her face shining in excitement, for example — she would lie, and not even know she was doing it. She'd say anything, say she saw Yo Yonson actually coming out of the room. They'd all say anything, because by now they believed it, or thought they believed it. They'd kidded themselves because that was the way they wanted it to have happened.

And poor Yo Yonson with his slow wits, his few stumbling words, could never stand up against them.

She would have to stop them. She would have to go to the police station. If she talked to Sergeant Connors and the other precinct boys, maybe they'd understand, because they liked her and trusted her judgment.

Maybe . . .

Connie Webber sat stubbornly for over an hour in the drab receiving room of the precinct house. There was a man she didn't know — must be a new cop — at the night desk and she wasn't going to risk talking with him. She was waiting to see Sergeant Connors, she said, and she just sat there.

All sorts of things were going on. Every few minutes some detective or other would come in or go out. It was all about the murder. Once a little man with a mustache and a black bag

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hurried in — the medical examiner. He stopped at the desk.

"Well, she was strangled between four and five this afternoon. No doubt about that. They didn't need me. A couple of them heard a scream around quarter of five. Didn't do anything, of course. In that sort of house, no one bats an eye at a scream." He grinned waggishly at the cop Connie didn't know. "If you were one of her boy friends, Joe, I hope you have an alibi."

One of her boy friends! That meant that what the woman in the crowd had said was right. The dead woman had been no better than she ought — a real slut. If she'd been that sort of woman, with the crazy, twisted kinds that always hang around a person like that, anything might have happened to her any time. Surely, they would see that Yo Yonson wouldn't be . . .

It was then that the thought came to Connie, and the moment it came she knew she would go through with it. The scream had been heard around quarter of five. That was the time Yo Yonson had been sitting with the pigeons right next to her in the square. Of course, as it happened, that afternoon she had remembered a nylon slip she'd forgotten to wash out, and just about four thirty she had left the pigeons and run home to do it before the dinners began.

But she'd been there with Yo Yonson until *almost* a quarter to five! No one need know about that little extra time.

Now that she was less angry, she could see more clearly. Sergeant Connors was kind — but would he and the other big, important cops really believe her when she tried to explain about Yo Yonson? Hadn't Mr. Mazzoli and the girls failed to understand? Hadn't Mr. Mazzoli called Yo Yonson a loco, no better than the animals in the zoo? Why wouldn't Sergeant Connors and the rest of them react the same way? Wouldn't it be better if she said she'd been there with Yo Yonson in the square *all the time* until five, and not to mention the nylon slip? It was a kind of lie, of course, but that way? none of them, not fifty of them with cruel tongues, would be able to hurt Yo Yonson.

Sergeant Connors came in with some big-shot detective. He grinned wearily at Connie.

"Hi, Connie, what you doing here?"

All the talk and everything lasted about three hours, but she won. Over and over again, to all ranks of policemen, she repeated her tale that Yo Yonson had been with her in the square. Over and over again, too, she tried to explain to them how kind he was, how harmless, how helpless for all his strength, and how the people in the house, because they were stupid, so set in their ways, would surely make up things against him. At first, some of the important detectives were not going to take her seriously, but Sergeant Connors insisted that she was a reliable witness. And it came out that there was nothing to pin on Yo Yonson — no fingerprints,

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no one whose word could be relied on had seen him around at the time. He had only been taken into custody to protect him from the angry crowd. What with the woman being the type she had been, and with all kinds of crackpots hanging around, it was finally all right. The Inspector explained that, since Yo Yonson had an alibi, they couldn't hold him — there was a law about that.

At four thirty in the morning Yo Yonson was released. That was when Connie found out that his name was Erling Something-or-other, and that he was a Norwegian sailor off a ship. It was written in the night book.

Yo Yonson didn't seem changed. At least, Connie couldn't see any difference. He came out of the precinct house quietly, stooping a little the way he always did, as if he was humble about being so tall. When he saw her, he gave his same quick, shy smile of pleasure. But he didn't seem to realize that he'd been locked up as a murder suspect, or that it was she who had obtained his release.

She thought: What's to be done with him? He can't go back to that horrible house. Heaven knows what they would do to him. But when she asked him, real slow and clear, where he was going, he only said:

"Home."

There was a sort of stubborness about him that she recognized and accepted. Maybe he knew more than she thought; maybe it was a matter of pride with him to show them all that he wasn't afraid.

She walked with him through the lonely night streets back to the square. The moment they reached it, she saw what had happened. There were no people around. It was too late for that. But, strewn over the sidewalk in chaos, were all Yo Yonson's pathetic belongings from the cellar. She could see them all. The orange-crate chairs had been ripped to pieces; the mattress had all its stuffing torn out; the cartons were crushed; the plates and cups broken into bits; and the old scraps of metal flung all over the sidewalk.

The bicycle-wheel cart was there too, but both its wheels had been hammered crooked.

Exhausted as she was, Connie felt anger flare up in her again. She would have liked to rush into the house and beat all those people with her bare fists. But Yo Yonson didn't seem to feel that way. He just stood looking at the wreckage — looking silently, resignedly. For the first time, Connie dimly grasped a fact about the world that she had never guessed before. Maybe the Yo Yonsons were so used to unkindness and unhappiness that they accepted it the way others accept the wind or the rain.

He moved over to examine the ruined wheels of his cart. Then he found one of the cartons that wasn't entirely crushed. He picked it up, and moving carefully through the litter, he selected several objects that seemed to mean most to him and put them in the carton. He turned back to Connie then and suddenly the

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hopeful smile came back to his face.

"You like? The dress from the big store? You like?"

"Oh, it's lovely." Connie rested her hand on his rock-like forearm. "It's really beautiful. One day I'll put it on for you."

"Good." Yo Yonson nodded his head, happy, reassured.

He turned from her then, with the carton under his arm.

It was after he had gone that Connie found it. She was passing a wire-mesh trash-basket under one of the street lights and she noticed something iridescent gleaming inside. She paused and looked down. Lying among the trash and the thrown-away newspapers, its legs tilted stiffly upward was one of the pigeons.

Its throat still flashed like a little rainbow, but she could tell from its lolling head that the bird had been strangled — its neck snapped clean in two.

For a moment there was nothing for Connie but normal horror and pity. One of her pigeons! The poor bird! Then she remembered what the woman in the crowd had said about the murdered slut. *Strangled with her neck snapped clean in two.*

Connie started to shiver. She looked down again at the pigeon, deposited there so neatly — almost as if it were packed away in a cardboard carton. She was still shivering hours later when she lay in bed at her home. The blankets were thick and the night was not cold, but she went on shivering just the same.

Next day at the restaurant she was welcomed like a heroine. Sergeant Connors had spread the news of what she'd done and everyone in the square, even some of the ones who had been in that terrible crowd the night before, seemed to be ashamed of what had happened and grateful to Connie for having put it right. Just because they were all fond of her and trusted her, it never occurred to any of them that she could have lied. She had said Yo Yonson had been with her, feeding the pigeons, at the time of the crime — so, of course, he had been there. He was innocent. And she, by coming forward, had saved an innocent man.

"Gee, Connie, you were wonderful!" Shirley's young face was gleaming with admiration. "I would never have had the nerve, not to go down to the police station, with everyone against him and all."

Rosa was just as enthusiastic and started saying she had, from the very beginning, always thought Yo Yonson kind of cute and sweet, like a stray puppy.

Only Mr. Mazzoli remained unaffected by this new trend. He pottered darkly about his kitchen.

"Connie, you a silly girl. How d'you know he didn't-a do it? How d'you know he didn't-a slip away just a moment before the five o'clock? With a loco man — what you know what he does when the craziness comes?"

No one else found the pigeon. No one saw Yo Yonson either. He had taken his carton of possessions and,

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like a stray puppy, wandered off to find a home somewhere else.

The days that came after the murder were terrible for Connie. No one seemed to notice the difference in her. She laughed and kidded with the customers just the way she'd always done. She seemed just as big and cheerful as ever. But inside she felt small, shriveled, and scared. She couldn't suspect Yo Yonson. To suspect him was to deny everything she had ever believed in about kindness. Kindness and cruelty — how could they both be in the same person, especially in a poor simple creature like Yo Yonson who loved the pigeons? No, she couldn't believe it. And yet . . .

Sometimes she'd wake up in the middle of the night and find herself shivering, just the way she had shivered on the night of the murder.

And there was one change in her which they certainly would have noticed if the murder hadn't put everything else out of their minds. She didn't go and look at the pigeons any more. Whenever she had to walk through the square and she knew they would be flashing up there and rolling through the sky, she couldn't bring herself to look up and see them.

The pigeons had somehow become like a finger in the sky, accusing her . . .

It was three weeks later that she got the grippe. She'd been ailing for several days but she would go to work. Finally, Mr. Mazzoli put his foot down and insisted that she go right home, take a couple of aspirins and stay in bed until she was better.

"You wanta all the customers should sneeze and carrying on like-a you? Go on. Scram. Get outta here."

Connie had thought it would be worse lying in bed alone in her room all day. But she was wrong. Those days of illness did something for her. They brought her back together again with the pigeons. There were roof-tops outside her window where quite a few pigeons lived. The first morning of her sickness, she woke up to find one of them standing on the window-sill, cocking its bright eye at her lying in the bed. After that, she started putting scraps, from the meals Rosa and Shirley brought over for her from the restaurant, out on the sill. Soon the pigeons came there just as tame as the ones in the square.

She was terribly weak from the grippe, but the pigeons took some of that bad feeling away. It was stupid, of course, but she felt kind of as if they'd forgiven her.

And, for long stretches at a time, she would forget about Yo Yonson . . .

It was on the third afternoon, at two o'clock, that the knock sounded at the door. She was still in bed and she was rather surprised, because Rosa and Shirley, her most faithful visitors, always dropped in mornings on their way to work and then again at four with the food from the restaurant. That day they'd already been there, bringing a cake Mr. Mazzoli had baked especially for her. Surely,

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they wouldn't be coming again right in the middle of the lunch rush?

But the knock sounded again. She got out of bed, throwing her old pink wrap around her, and went to the door to open it.

Yo Yonson was standing there.

Even before she had time to think, she was afraid. She felt the fear in her knees, in her stomach. She didn't remember to smile. And, maybe because she hadn't, he didn't either. He stood looking at her, then he shambled into the room and closed the door.

He was different. Even in her fear, she could tell that at once. His eyes were sort of fixed and . . . different. He wasn't stooping as if he was humble, He stood straight up, so that his blond head almost reached the ceiling and the bulk of him seemed to swallow all the space in the room.

And then Connie seemed to hear the voice of the woman in the crowd: *That's the way they go — they have spells on them when they kill.*

He was standing scarcely two feet away from her, looking at her as if he didn't recognize her. But he must recognize her, of course. How else could he have come here? But he hadn't known where she lived. He must have gone to the restaurant, and Shirley or Rosa, who were so crazy about him now she had saved him, had given him the address. Then, if he had come on purpose, surely it was because they were friends, because . . .

She pulled the wrap more closely around her, and moistened her lips.

"Hello," she said, but her voice didn't sound right. It was false and dry, giving her fear away.

It was then that she heard the cooing on the window-sill. She glanced around. There were the pigeons, still pecking at the crumbs of Mr. Mazzoli's cake that she had put out.

And, as she turned her head, Yo Yonson took his gaze from her and shifted it to the pigeons too. He swung around and stood looking at them. Slowly a smile came to his lips. But the smile was different from usual. It was sort of dazzled, as if he was looking at something too beautiful, something that didn't fit into a life of drabness, damp cellars, and carts with crooked bicycle wheels.

He started toward the window — very gently. He could walk so softly. The pigeons went on feeding and clucking. Even when he was right up beside them, they didn't stir. It was as if they knew him.

That was the moment when Connie could have run for the door and escaped — while he was looking at the pigeons. She realized it, but she couldn't do it. If she ran, that would mean that she had lost her faith in everything that mattered. She saw that and suddenly she wasn't afraid any more. She waited, watching Yo Yonson, not calling out, not doing anything.

His hand went cautiously toward one of the pigeons. The bird didn't move. He picked it up, holding it out in front of him, gazing at the rainbow on its breast.

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Then it was done. His fingers crept up to the pigeon's neck and closed and squeezed until the head flopped over and the flat eye stared as the neck swung to and fro. After a while Yo Yonson opened his fist. He brought up his other hand and kept the pigeon in his huge cupped palms. But it was at his hands that he was looking, not at the pigeon. He was looking at them with a kind of pride, almost with love.

The terror came back to Connie with a rush. But it wasn't just fear for herself. It was the terror of someone who half-understands a great truth. Yo Yonson hadn't killed the bird because he was evil. He hadn't even killed it, like a child, because it was beautiful and he wanted it for himself. He had killed it because it was something that didn't need him.

His poor baffled mind saw beauty and kindness all around him, but he had never been a part of it. He was always alone, with his desire for love that was never granted, with his hatred of being the unwanted one, the one that was always mocked at. Most of the time he could endure it. But times when it got too bad, he thought of his strength. That was something he did have. And by using his strength to kill things, it helped his pride.

The woman with the dyed hair had mocked him. Maybe that was why he had killed her. But he would probably have killed her anyway when the feeling came, because, when it came, the beautiful, the ugly, the kind, the cruel — all the things in life that weren't for him had to be killed — to make him feel all right again.

The woman with the dyed hair, the pigeons — now Connie . . .

Yo Yonson had dropped the bird. He was looking at her again — if just having his eyes fixed on her was looking. He came straight toward her and, in the wonder and terror of her knowledge, she just stood.

He took her up in his arms as easily as if she were an empty cardboard carton. He sat down on the bed with her on his lap. One of his great hands came to her throat and rested there for a moment. Then it moved on up to her hair. She felt him stroking her hair gently and, in spite of her strange exaltation, she was aware enough to know it was hopeless to cry out or to struggle. If she did, he would kill her. It would be over in a flash.

The hand was still stroking her hair. She felt a tug and a sharp pain. Then his hand was down in her lap. In it were a few strands of her blonde hair. But he was not looking at them. He was gazing at his hands again, just as he had gazed at them when he held the pigeon.

Suddenly, the knowledge in her became strength, strength such as she had never felt before. It bubbled up in her almost like laughter. Yo Yonson didn't have to feel alone. He didn't have to be starved of kindness. Inside, he was like a mudhole in the desert, cracked, parched. It was kindness that mattered, and kindness could fall like rain.

"I know why you came." Her voice

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was right now. It wasn't an insincere voice that he could see through. "Of course, how silly of me! It's the dress, isn't it? I promised to show you how I look in the dress."

She patted his great hand, which still held the strands of her own blonde hair, and slipped out of his lap. He made no attempt to stop her. She ran to the closet, pulled out the black-lace dress and, quite without shame, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, threw off her wrap and started to struggle into the dress.

He got up from the bed, still holding the bright hair. He came right toward her. But she smiled at him, squeezing and wriggling to get into the tight dress.

He was so close that she could feel his breath fanning down on her. His hand went out toward her throat.

"There!" She gave a great gusty laugh and pirouetted in front of him. "Isn't that something? See how pretty it is! Thank you. Thank you so much."

As he looked at her, his eyes slowly changed. The deadness was fading and gradually the old pigeon look came back — the delight. With it, a smile.

"You like?" he said.

He dropped down on the floor at her feet then. He was still kneeling there humbly when Mr. Mazzoli, Sergeant Connors, and Frank O'Mulligan arrived.

In a moment Mr. Mazzoli's arms were around her.

"That Rosa — that crazy Rosa. He come-a to the restaurant and Rosa, she give-a the address. Only later she tell-a me what she done. Quick I think: *Dio*, the loco — the crazy man go to kill-a my Connie. Quick I run out from the kitchen. Sergeant Connors and Frank, they sit there taking the spaghetti. Quick I grab them. We run . . . Oh, Connie, *la mia ragazza*, my little silly *ragazza!* Quick, we go to City Hall. We stop-a this foolishness — quick . . ."

But, although she luxuriated in the protective warmth of Mr. Mazzoli's arms, Connie could still think only of Yo Yonson. He would have to be put away. She saw that now. Although he wasn't really bad, it wasn't right for him to be free around a lot of cruel people who didn't understand him, who got him all mixed up, who turned him into a — a monster. Yes, he would have to be put away. And maybe it would be happier for him like that — better than the damp cellars.

Yo Yonson had got up and was standing, quietly, between Sergeant Connors and Frank O'Mulligan.

"Well, Connie," said the Sergeant. "I guess you got a little mixed-up on the times in that alibi."

She turned from the protection of Mr. Mazzoli's circling arms.

"Don't let them hurt him, Sergeant." Part of her was thinking now, with a kind of awe, that this was the first time Mr. Mazzoli had ever come out of his kitchen in the afternoon. "Be kind to him. That's all he needs. He'll get along fine, honest he will — if you just make them be kind . . ."

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The enemy is at hand.

— VIRGIL

John W. Vandercook's mother is a novelist, his father is one of the founders of the United Press Association. So, all the forces of heredity challenged Mr. Vandercook to become a writer . . . But first, of necessity, there had to be varied forms of apprenticeship. It takes experience, background, and a passionate inquisitiveness to pave the way for a literary career. After a year at Yale, Vandercook tried being an actor. He played in stock, had a few small parts on Broadway, did a brief tour in vaudeville, then decided that the periods of "at liberty" were too long, too frequent, and too discouraging. So he turned to newspaper work, in Columbus, Washington, Baltimore, and New York. That led, with curious inevitability, to twelve years of leisurely globe-trotting, and from this wandering and wondering came Vandercook's first book, TOM-TOM *(1926).*

Then a long series of journeys, hegiras, and explorations: to Haiti, which produced BLACK MAJESTY *(1928); to a previously unmapped corner of Liberia; to the Cameroons in Africa; to uncharted parts of New Guinea; to the Solomon Islands and the Fijis . . . In the intervals between trips, Vandercook returned to New York and wrote many articles and books on travel and on world affairs — he knew what was going on, and where, from on-the-spot observation. In 1940 he joined the staff of the National Broadcasting Company as a news commentator, and in the next six years he wrote and delivered more than 2000 broadcasts. Now, aside from annual lecture tours throughout the United States, John W. Vandercook is what he was destined to be from the beginning — a writer.*

Mr. Vandercook's story, "The Challenge," won a Second Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Perhaps it can be said that only a sensitive, perceptive writer like Mr. Vandercook, with all his first-hand knowledge of the world and its inhabitants, could write a story like "The Challenge." It takes a deep and accurate understanding of people to know what the real problem is, to recognize the true identity of the enemy, and to be sure of the only way in which "the challenge" can be met, fought, and beaten. In many respects, "The Challenge" is the most significant story to come out of last year's — or any year's — contest.

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THE CHALLENGE

by JOHN W. VANDERCOOK

"COME IN! COME IN!" SINCE THE strained, high-pitched voice must be assumed to be his host's, Professor Nadelman obeyed. Though the knob turned readily, the big, white-painted door seemed extraordinarily heavy. Professor Nadelman put down his rope-tied cardboard suitcase so that he could use both hands. It was, he thought calmly, as if he were pushing against something soft — like a great weight of feathers.

The small, alert-looking man in tweeds who stood some paces back in the hallway was staring into the angle behind the now half-opened door. Professor Nadelman looked. There was nothing there.

"Try it, please. Again!"

This time the door swung easily. Professor Nadelman opened it all the way, then closed it. The obstruction, whatever it was, had disappeared.

With a visible effort Mr. Pelerin recovered himself and put out his hand. The two men frankly surveyed each other.

Professor Nadelman, as he had expected, found this distinguished American art critic to whom he was already so enormously indebted entirely to his liking. Mr. Pelerin's gray eyes flashed intelligence. His closely trimmed dark hair was graying. His slender body radiated energy. An air of preoccupation, Professor Nadelman put down to nerves.

For his part Mr. Pelerin was shocked. He had expected to be shocked. But not like this. The world-famous authority on the Renaissance was a scarecrow. Even though Professor Nadelman was thinner than any human being he had ever seen, the suit of cheap black shoddy he wore was many sizes too small for him. The hawk-like, learned face was literally gray. Since Mr. Pelerin had heard no car, Professor Nadelman must have carried his heavy suitcase from the depot. It was unbelievable. But — he had pushed back the door.

Nadelman saw the look of astonishment.

"You must not, my dear benefactor," he said in his gently accented English, "be concerned about me. I have great endurance. I learned it," he smiled faintly, "in an excellent school. Believe me, I am very well."

Mr. Pelerin took both his guest's bony hands in his.

"And you, I beg of you, must never think of me, much less call me, your 'benefactor.' When I heard — when all our own little world — heard that you were still alive —" Mr. Pelerin's smile was charming. "'There was great rejoicing.' You will stay here as long as you choose. When you feel able we shall work. I am alone. It is a big house."

"It is," said Professor Nadelman

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politely, "a very beautiful house."

"It was a hideous house," said Mr. Pelerin sharply. "Grotesquely, almost brutally, ugly. I bought it because the land was good and the village charming. The house was a challenge. A problem in practical esthetics. All my adult life I have taught what we so mincingly call 'good taste.' This was my chance to learn if I could apply my preaching."

"You have," inquired Professor Nadelman slowly, "won?"

Mr. Pelerin looked at him acutely. Nadelman's English, he knew, was faultless. His brilliant *Age of Alexander VI* had been written in it. Nadelman had not said "succeeded." He had said "won."

"I am not sure," said Mr. Pelerin. "I am not at all sure."

"Perhaps," suggested the emaciated scholar, "I can assist." His mouth, though gentle, had unexpected firmness. "I am not —" Apologetically Professor Nadelman stretched out his right arm so the sleeve of the scanty jacket slid up. On the underside of his forearm was tattooed, in blue, the number 53696. "I am not," he repeated, "without experience."

Mr. Pelerin's taste was exquisite. What he had brought to this house in a New Hampshire village represented the accumulation of years of discriminating travel. The rugs, pale Ispahans and robust Bokharas, were like old gardens. The small El Greco *View of Toledo* over the Adams' mantel, which Pelerin had discovered in a Cordoba junkshop, brought real tears of pleasure to Elias Nadelman's eyes. But the stench, the pain of Buchenwald and the rat-like life he had led since then in the ruins of the land he had once thought his, had sharpened new perceptions. All that Pelerin had done was a thin glaze. For all his skill, he had disguised this house, he had not yet changed it. The spirit of the place still leered with sullen and unresting anger through the hand-blocked wallpapers and the triple coats of dove-gray paint. Nadelman could feel the weight of it.

Though Mr. Pelerin concealed the fact with the urbanity of the man of parts he was, his guest could see he was uneasy. In a lesser man, the word would have been fear. It was an emotion Elias Nadelman had known well. But that had been long ago . . .

After dinner and a short hour of talk before the open fire — for the spring night was chill — Mr. Pelerin suggested they retire. Early bedtime, he explained, was a village custom into which he had readily fallen. With characteristic thoughtfulness he did not offer to escort the older man to his room. The host-and-guest relationship, he had resolved, must be abolished at once. The exile must be made to feel this house was his.

Professor Nadelman was glad that he had not been escorted. For he saw the weight the moment he switched on the light in his bedroom.

The center of the white candlewick

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spread on the spool bed was depressed, as if a dog were lying on it. Professor Nadelman strode forward and, leaning, seized the spread's four corners and brought them together. Though the weight — he had not expected it would be so great — made him stagger, he turned swiftly and swung the sack-like bundle with all his force against the edge of the half-open door.

There was no sound. But, as if water ran from it, the spread grew lighter. In a few seconds it was empty. Professor Nadelman shook it out, folded it neatly, and hung it over the back of a chair.

The bed was the softest in which he had slept since the hard and heavy men in black boots had come one summer night to his house just off the Ringstrasse, which he had never seen again, and taken him away. That had been twelve years ago. In those years he had learned much.

It was true, he was a little tired. The bony arm marked with the five blue numbers reached out and turned out the light.

. . . It was curious, Mr. Pelerin reflected. It was very curious indeed. He should feel that he was Nadelman's protector. The guest was older. Whatever he might say, he looked inconceivably fragile. He was penniless. Instead, it was Nadelman who gave him assurance. Starved and horribly beaten scarecrow though he was, he exuded calm, confidence — yes, survival. It was good to have him. Mr. Pelerin said so.

He did not say why.

In the year he had spent in Cloverly, New Hampshire, the only real friend Mr. Pelerin had made was a doctor who lived across the street.

Doctor George Gage, his graying-reddish hair and his tweeds both looking as if they had been deliberately mussed, and clutching his scarred old faggot of a bulldog pipe in his strong teeth, strolled over during the morning when they were walking in the yard.

Together the three men surveyed the house. The new owner had painted it a gleaming white. With his quick gestures and birdlike energy, Pelerin explained that once it had been red, the color of dried blood; that he had removed a veranda, two turrets, and rods of fretwork. Despite his efforts, he had not been able to make grass grow within twenty feet of the foundations. Perhaps it was because he had not yet brought himself to cut down the giant black spruces which surrounded it.

Unlike most householders, Mr. Pelerin did not seem to expect praise.

It was as well. The big box of a place was still too high, too square. Its windows were too narrow. They stared like slitted, baleful python's eyes.

It was Mr. Pelerin's custom to spend a certain time each day at work in his study. Since it seemed, when the hour came, that Pelerin was hanging back, Professor Nadelman made an excuse to accompany

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him. The door opened. There was no obstruction nor any indication of an abnormal presence. Then Nadelman walked across the shaded street to call on Doctor Gage.

Gage greeted him in a cluttered surgery. "Come over for a check-up?"

The refugee, the tips of his long, thin fingers together, shook his head. "One of the best physicians in Europe assured me I am imperishable. So was he. We were fellow prisoners."

Doctor Gage chewed his empty pipe and nodded. "Our friend?"

"Not yet. The house itself. Who has lived in it?"

Reflectively, Gage tapped the pipe in the palm of his left hand. "Pelerin's the second buyer since the Mullens. The first was a retired farmer. It was too much for him. Too hard to take care of. He let it go back to the bank for a small mortgage. Before Pelerin came along the place had been empty for twelve years. A terrible eyesore. Pelerin's done wonders."

"There was," his visitor inquired, "no other suggestion?"

Gage peered at him under shaggy eyebrows. "Any fanciful suggestion, you mean?"

Professor Nadelman smiled. "I spent, my dear Doctor Gage, eight years in Nazi prison camps. It is an experience which does not encourage — fancy. These Mullens? Who were they?"

Gage teetered back in a battered chair supported by a coiled black spring. "They were dinosaurs. The old man came here back in the nineties and built that house. You've not been here long enough for it to have any implication when I tell you they built a factory. You can see what's left of it down by the depot. But this is an old town, a quiet town, in the middle of good farming country. It needed a factory about as much as it needed typhus." Gage paused and sucked at his cold pipe to sort and simplify his tale. Then he continued. "There was the old man and his son. Two-hundred-pounders, both of 'em. Black hair, big hands, and sharp little pig's eyes. They were partners. In business and under the skin. They hated each other's guts. It was in the days of free immigration. They got their labor from New York. Droves. As helpless and confused as cattle. They always took care to bring more than they wanted, so there'd be plenty without jobs. The town hated it. But the Mullens, I regret to say, waxed rich."

"And what," urged Professor Nadelman, "became of them?"

Doctor Gage studied the hawk-narrow but resolute face for a long moment.

"The old man," he said matter of factly, "went first. Crushed. The cable of an overhead crane gave way. A huge bucket of scrap iron."

"An accident?"

"Certainly! There was an inquest. Everything was perfectly clear. Since he and Frank — Frank was the son — were alone at the plant when it happened, there was gossip, of course.

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This is a small town, Nadelman. But it came to nothing." Doctor Gage snorted. "Then it really started. Frank had married. A slim blonde girl from one of those Boston banking families. No one could figure how he'd done it, but he did. He brought her back to that old red house to live. I liked her."

Gage looked down and meaninglessly whacked his pipe three times on the arm of his chair. "I almost loved her. Delicate. A lady. Yet all the courage in the world. Frank was ambitious. Nothing else. For I always thought he despised her. But it turned out old man Mullen had left her his share of the plant. Fifty-one percent. That made her Frank's boss."

Doctor Gage pointed. "You didn't see much through those trees. Or hear much. But you could guess plenty. Things at the factory began to change. Some of those poor devils got raises. They were on a 60-hour week. It was cut to 48. Frank looked like a black cloud."

With elaborate care Doctor Gage put his pipe down on the desk. Professor Nadelman's eyes had already detected that the hand which held it had begun to tremble.

"Then one morning early I got a hurry call to come over. Frank, in his bathrobe, met me at the door." Gage broke off. "Funny. Funny reaction, I mean, but he held the door for some seconds before he let me in. All he said was that Carrie — that was her name — wasn't breathing when he woke up.

"Cyanosed, we call it. Possibly heart. Or, on the other hand, suffocation. That is to say, deliberate suffocation. Murder. I was supposed to sign the death certificate. I wouldn't."

Gage came to as complete a stop as if his narrative were ended. He filled his pipe from a brass-topped glass humidor on the desk and carefully lit it. Without taking the now belching briar from his mouth he said to his guest through the clouds of smoke:

"You must be very persuasive, Nadelman. I don't generally do this sort of thing. There's no good raking up the past. I want you to promise. Keep this between ourselves. Our friend over there is in a state of nerves. His control's first-rate, but I'm a good enough doctor to see through it. All this wouldn't do him any good. If he knows already — and I don't think he does — that's his business. But it's not mine. Or, if you'll forgive my saying so, your's."

Professor Nadelman inclined his head in agreement. He absently examined the palm of his right hand. It was as heavily calloused as a peasant's.

"Tell me, Doctor," he said quietly. "This courageous young lady, this Carrie — she fought back?"

Gage's astonishment made his pipe leap from between his teeth and land with a shower of sparks in his lap. He beat them out with unnecessary violence.

"What made you say that?"

Nadelman spread his hands. "The house was empty. The factory those

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strong men built is in ruins. Somewhere there was victory."

The doctor nodded. "There was. There was, indeed."

"Continue, please."

"Well, I didn't like it. Admittedly, I was only guessing, but I thought she had been suffocated. As if — well, as if by some big weight. Say, a body. I told Frank flatly I wasn't satisfied. I reported to the coroner and stepped out."

Gage, with his slow, bear-like movements, got up and stood by a window which looked to the dark trees and the gleam of the white house across the street.

"The morning of the hearing Frank Mullen sent for me. He was in bed, just his shock of black hair, his hard mouth, and those little pig's eyes of his showing. Even his arms were under the covers. In his bullying, snarling way, he ordered me to take his temperature. Nothing else. It was none of my business what ailed him and he'd get better quicker if I'd not meddle with him. All he wanted of me was my report he was too sick to go to court. You usually did what Frank Mullen told you. I did. I still remember. 105 point 2. He wasn't faking. The hearing was put off. It was two days before he sent for me again."

Gage came back to his chair. "A doctor gets tough. Has to. But Frank Mullen scared me. You could hardly recognize him. He was swollen. A kind of red-purple. What you could still see of his eyes burned like red coals. He was losing. He had lost. So he hated the whole wide world. . . . Not until he was dead did I have a chance to examine him. I knew what it was, but not why. Blood poisoning. We had no anti-biotics then."

Gage put his pipe down to free both hands. Leaning forward, he shaped them into claws, reached up, and with startling violence ripped them downward through the air.

"On each of his arms, from the shoulders to below the elbows, were four parallel scratches. They had cut deep into the flesh. They had infected. They'd killed. They were made by the fingernails of human hands."

Gage nodded. "Yes, she'd fought back."

It was for Mr. Pelerin to choose, and obviously he had chosen. The guest would respect his host's decision. They would not speak of it.

After his first six weeks in Cloverly, Professor Nadelman became convinced that Pelerin was being tormented by the weight more and more frequently. In spite of his considerable gifts of self-control, the younger man was eating badly. His habit of inattention became more marked. Mr. Pelerin had high courage, but the invisible, soundless, formless persecution was wearing it away.

Professor Nadelman on the other hand began to encounter it less often. He thought he knew why.

The weight had no fixed timetable or locale. The door of a closet or a

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bedroom might, on opening, encounter ponderous, yet soft, resistance. At first Nadelman would simply force it open. That the terrible years had made him strong as tempered wire gave him wry amusement. Then he hit upon the trick of opening doors behind which crouched the unseen weight by a sharp, swinging motion, by a repeated hammering of the oaken panels. And that particular form of annoyance soon grew less.

Once, alone, he entered Mr. Pelerin's little-used formal drawing-room and switched on the light. The floor was covered by a Chinese rug of singularly deep pile. Over an area of indeterminate shape, perhaps a square yard in extent, the wool threads were flattened. As he watched, the area began slowly to increase. In the light from the crystal chandelier he could see the erect tufts of the carpet lie down one by one and, as it were, harden, until the jute fabric underneath began to show.

He darted into the hall and came back with a bamboo walking-stick. With all his strength, he began to flail, to whip, the place on which the weight rested. The cane met no resistance. Each blow was completed against the rug. But instantly the area effected began to shrink. The tufts stood upright. In a moment, when Professor Nadelman paused for breath, it occupied no more space than could be covered by two spread hands.

Pelerin had heard him and was standing in the door, his hands clenched, his eyes staring, his lips sucked in. Before the professor could resume his offensive, the weight, with startling rapidity, sped across the room — its progress revealed by the flattening of the rug — until it came to a blind wall and disappeared.

To Nadelman the demonstration seemed complete. Clearly, the weight felt pain. Under counterattack, it fled. Pelerin was a man of intelligence. Nadelman must assume the lesson was not lost on him.

The two men walked in silence to the library. When Mr. Pelerin poured brandy his hands shook so that the neck of the decanter rattled a thin and frightened tune on the goblets' rims. Neither spoke. But both, now, had seen it. It was real.

It was Nadelman's conviction that the weight was hostile — to the changes in the house, *its* house, which Pelerin had made. And to them. It was also his belief the weight was subject to certain laws. Proof soon came.

In the room with the Adams' mantel stood one of Mr. Pelerin's most prized possessions, a Louis XV occasional table whose carved legs tapered to the diameter of a fountain pen. Pelerin owned many things of more value, but nothing of greater delicacy. The whole perfect, useless thing could be lifted by two fingers.

The two men were at lunch when they heard the reverberation of the bass keys of a piano, as if a cat had jumped on them, then, seconds later, the crash of splintering wood.

The little table, an irreparable ruin,

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lay in fragments on the floor. They were just in time to see the fringed corner of a rug twisted aside by the weight's passing, before it disappeared.

The table had been crushed from the top downward. It was plain how it had happened. Mrs. Humphries, the woman from the village who "did" for them, in cleaning that morning had left the table away from its accustomed position close to the rosewood piano. A small footstool had been moved near the piano bench.

The weight, then, was like a variable quantity of soft, invisible putty, but a putty of concentrated mass which — no word quite fitted — *poured* itself forward and even upward; but it was subject to the laws of gravity. It had forced itself onto the footstool, then onto the bench, then by way of the keyboard onto the piano, whence it had dropped down upon the table. The act was one of pure vandalism, vindictiveness.

Professor Nadelman had to speak. "My dear friend," he said gently, "are you very sure you are right? Not desertion. I would not propose it, but perhaps a short absence?"

Mr. Pelerin's voice, though it shook a little, was steely. "Elias, I am not a coward."

The elderly, emaciated refugee inclined his head.

But he was worried. His generous savior, now his friend, was showing the strain. Slight in build at best, Pelerin was visibly losing weight. His skin was a bad color. With the coming of the still July days he began to complain fretfully of the heat. In words Pelerin revealed nothing, but fear was peering through his eyes. Though the weight now avoided Nadelman almost completely, its remorseless, secret war upon his host was fast reaching, the professor began to believe, a mortal stage.

Then he was certain.

Pelerin was in his study. Through the closed door Elias Nadelman heard a high and piercing scream that in a mere instant choked into terrifying silence.

Mr. Pelerin sat at his big, leather-topped Sheraton desk. He had fainted. He had been examining a Chinese painting by separating with both extended hands the two sticks on which it was tightly rolled. His head lolled forward but his hands, the fingers wide, were still pressed hard upon the antique painted silk. The two rolled ends of the painting were flat and crumpled. The weight lay on them.

An Elizabethan dagger which Pelerin used as a paper cutter lay on the desk. With a pounce Nadelman took it and with swift yet carefully controlled savagery stabbed and stabbed again through the air just above the desk. Instantly he saw the blood flow back into Pelerin's pale hands. Released, they slid back across the desktop and fell supinely in his lap.

Nadelman could not be sure. It may come from Pelerin's unconscious lips. But he thought he heard a moan.

An hour later he rang Doctor Gage's bell.

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Without preamble or emotion Nadelman described the incidents of the preceding weeks — from the formless, invisible mass which had tried, harmlessly, to oppose his first opening of Mr. Pelerin's door to the physical assault which had just taken place.

When he had finished, Gage smiled, but only with his mouth.

"I assume, Elias," he said, "you didn't come for my opinion?"

"No, George."

"As a physician," Gage persisted, "and for the record, I suppose you know what it is. You and Pelerin are suffering from a collective hallucination. Why you are, or why it's taken this form, the good Lord may know." He held up a grizzled, capable hand to ward off interruption. "I know that between the two of you, you've got four times my brains. In these things, though, intelligence isn't a safeguard. Understand me, now. Diagnosis, right or wrong, doesn't alter anything. A fact of the mind is no less a fact than an aneurism. Maybe I'm just a country doctor, but I do know that. Let's simply say a condition exists. The point is, how do we treat it? What do you want of me?"

"I want you to send him away. I'm afraid."

Gage looked at him appraisingly. "And you don't scare easy, do you, Elias?"

"I'm afraid," Nadelman amended, "for our friend. Not for myself."

The late afternoon sunlight streamed in the tall upstairs windows. Mr. Pelerin was in bed. His eyes were closed, his clever face against the white pillows looked thin and drained of strength. His hands were outside the sheet that on this summer day was all the covering needed.

Doctor Gage stood looking down at him. It had been thirty years since he had come into this room. Then it had been all sombre darkness. Now it was all light. . . . Obscurely, he was not so sure that it had changed.

Suddenly his eyes sharpened. Leaning, he picked up Pelerin's hands and put his face close to them. Putting them gently down, he summoned Nadelman to a far corner of the room.

"His hands," Gage whispered hoarsely, "are bruised! One of the nails has begun to darken. It's as if they had been crushed."

The professor smiled. "By an hallucination, doctor."

Mr. Pelerin spoke from the bed. The voice was so much his own, still so full of nervous force, that both men started.

"George! Elias! I beg of you! Surely at your times of life you should both know there is nothing so intensely irritating to an invalid as a whispered consultation. Especially when the invalid isn't ill."

Rather tiredly, Mr. Pelerin pulled himself higher on his pillows and cautiously laced the two bruised hands behind his head. "Come closer, both of you, so I can talk to you." He studied their faces for a moment before he went on. "You are both interested in my ailment. I can tell you

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what it is. Though the form — " Mr. Pelerin drew his hands from behind his head and held them motionless in the air for an instant before he put them back, " — though the particular form," he repeated, "is unusual, the complaint, I fear, is common. It is called — failure."

Pelerin looked away from them, his eyes clouded with reflection. "I have attempted to replace ugliness with — though the word has grown shabby I must use it — with beauty. Force — with grace. Strength with — what shall I say? — intelligence. The undertaking is notoriously hard. I have not succeeded. So one day I shall die of it."

"Nonsense!" In Doctor Gage's own ears the exclamation sounded strangely loud. He hurried on in a more normal tone. "You're tired. You've used yourself up, that's all."

Mr. Pelerin smiled, as if from far away. "So what, George, do you prescribe?"

"Rest. Distraction. For a month or two anyway you've got to go away."

"Go?" said Mr. Pelerin. "You mean 'run.' It would not be practicable, George. One cannot flee one's own inadequacy. Elias, don't you agree?"

"Your only inadequacy, my dear friend," said Nadelman sharply, "is your — technique. You rely on courage. The antagonist despises courage. You are firm, patient. You put your trust in superior example. The error is common. If persisted in, not only you but all civilization may very well 'die of it.' The Brute fears only pain."

In a different tone, Nadelman persisted, "George is right. For a short time you must go away. Gain strength. Gather your resources. It will not be easy for you, but you must learn to fight back, to be as ruthless as the enemy. I think you should go quickly."

The tip of Mr. Pelerin's tongue crept out to wet his lips.

"Very well. Tomorrow."

Doctor Gage showed no disposition to go home. Nor to talk. Nadelman heard him wandering through the house, peering into concealed places and softly opening and closing doors.

They dined sketchily on a table in Mr. Pelerin's room. Since for the first time among them conversation limped, Nadelman talked at length about his chosen field, the Renaissance.

Afterward, all that remained in Doctor Gage's memory was one phrase:

"*Beauty was honored in a time of violence because it was defended with sharp steel.*"

While Gage sat with Mr. Pelerin, Nadelman made his preparations for the night.

In the cheap cardboard suitcase he had brought from Europe was a whip. The handle was short, the butt of lead, and the woven lash of discolored leather about six feet long. It was a curious souvenir for an elderly professor of esthetics to have kept. He had picked it up at Büchenwald where Block Leader Hansel had dropped it in the hurry of his departure at the

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news that the Americans were near. The black whip had cut so often into Nadelman's own skin, been stained with so much of his own blood, that he knew it intimately. Since then, he had learned to handle it.

Secretly, but with no shame, Professor Nadelman had always hoped for an opportunity to use it. There were debts it was unholy not to pay.

The distinguished author of *The Age of Alexander VI* rolled the whip tightly, hid it under his coat, and went to his host's room.

Mr. Pelerin was asleep. In a low voice Doctor Gage said he had injected a strong enough sedative to last through the night. Nadelman was not sure he approved but it was too late to object. After a little, saying he was to be called at any moment, Gage went home.

Professor Nadelman turned on the light in the ceiling and those by the mirror and the desk, so the room was a white glare. The chair he drew close to Mr. Pelerin's bedside was carefully selected. It was comfortable, yet not so luxurious as to tempt him into sleep. The manifestations of force were often cunning. He had taken care that every door in the cruel and sulking house was left ajar.

Elias Nadelman took the whip from under his coat. With a light shake he made it ready and laid it across his knees.

The hands of the tiny Limoges enamel clock on Pelerin's bedside table moved very slowly to midnight, to one, to two. At intervals Nadelman systematically moved his arms, his legs. He was not sleepy, but there was danger that without occupation his mind, his senses, might grow dull. The man in the bed slept without moving.

It was surprising that he noticed. It was a mark of the perfection of Pelerin's housekeeping that every hinge was oiled. The open door which gave onto the dark hall was slowly closing.

With a single leap the gaunt, prematurely aged man flung himself against it. The weight behind it made him grunt. Though his position was awkward he brought down the black lash of the whip into the emptiness outside with all the force he could summon. At the third stinging cut the door gave way so suddenly that Nadelman all but stumbled to his knees. At once he realized he had made an incomparably grave mistake. Nowhere, except in Pelerin's own room, had he left on any lights. Precious seconds were lost while he found and snapped the switch. Nadelman sucked in his breath. Never had the weight been so great.

Just at the head of the stairs that led into the darkness of the floor below, the gray rug was pressed down hard over a loosely circular area nearly five feet in diameter. With a vicious whistle and a crack like a gunshot, the whip lashed down on the floor. Nadelman felt a sense of high and impure joy. Instantly the weight flung itself down the steps. Though nothing was to be seen, the steps creaked, the heavy oak banister shook.

Nadelman, the whip ready, was

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after it, his bony wrists thrusting from the short sleeves, his shoddy jacket flying. Once more time was lost while the lean pursuer groped in the air for the cord of the hanging lamp which lit the lower hall.

As he found it, the nearby door to the drawing-room, which opened inward, shut with a soft rush and a click of the brass latch. The weight tonight was moving more swiftly and with more appearance of intent than ever before. Twice in the next few moments Nadelman was sure he had stung it with his whip. The professor's lips were drawn back over his teeth, the skin of his face felt tight, and he was supremely happy.

In a silence unbroken but for the rasp of his own breathing and the whish and crackle of the whip, the chase led on. Two more rooms were traversed. In each he lost time switching on the light.

In the high-ceiled dining-room Nadelman stopped. He was panting. All trace of the antagonist had vanished. The pleasant room with its shining oval of mahogany was snug, at peace. Nadelman could hear no creak, or rustle.

Peering intently, he turned slowly around. A door into the cellar opened from an alcove at one end of the room. That, too, he had left open. He thought he saw it move. The fury — not just of the night, the house, but of the years — was hot in him. He was no longer thinking. With three long strides he reached the cellar door and stood staring down into the darkness. The door struck hard against the tensed calves of his legs, his back. He staggered, missed his footing, and plunged down. His head struck the jagged foundation wall, and Professor Nadelman lost consciousness.

It was impossible to tell. But when his senses struggled upward out of the black turmoil of insensibility, it seemed to him he had been unconscious only a few minutes. With a cry of fear he stumbled to his feet. His left arm hurt acutely. A groping hand encountered the feel of warm blood on his scalp. Moaning with terror, he scrambled up out of the sour darkness, ran with great pumping strides of his long legs through the hall, up the next flight, and into Mr. Pelerin's room.

The sheets had been kicked into a tangle. One pillow was on the floor. Mr. Pelerin's hands were stiffly outspread, as if they had been arrested in the act of pushing. His face was purple.

For a moment the compound of despair, grief — above all, the knowledge of how he had been tricked — almost deprived Nadelman of sight. Seconds passed before his vision cleared. Pelerin was slightly built. The mattress and the rumpled pillow on which he lay were firm. Yet his light frame was pressed as deeply into them as if his body were a giant's. The weight still lay on him.

Nadelman had lost the whip. It must still be lying at the bottom of the cellar steps. He clawed his hands and with the energy of a madman be-

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gan to scratch and rip and rake the empty air fractions of inches above Pelerin's face, chest, arms. He could feel nothing.

But he was winning. He was winning! Gradually his friend's contorted body *rose*. The inward slope of the spring mattress flattened. There was the faint sound of sucked-in breath. Pelerin was still alive. The weight had withdrawn.

There was a phone on the desk. Doctor Gage answered the first ring. In two minutes — clearly he had not undressed — he was in Pelerin's room. With hairy, clumsy hands suddenly turned skillful, he injected a stimulant; then pressed, relaxed, and pressed again on Pelerin's lower ribs. At last, satisfied, the doctor straightened the tangled sheets and made the still unconscious man comfortable. Not until he was done did he face the other man.

His eyes dark with hostility he took in the Jew's dust-smeared clothes, his panting breath, the blood upon his head.

"You knew, of course," Gage said harshly. "Last week Pelerin made a will. I witnessed it. He leaves you everything." He jerked his head. "You'd better go. I'm going to stay right here all night."

The import of the words made Nadelman physically reel. The fine head with the arched hawk-nose drew down between his lifted shoulders, his hands opened in a gesture of false obedience, of mocking submission as old and as little understood as time. Without a word Elias Nadelman turned and walked away.

In his own room, he did not turn on the light. Still dressed, the wound on his scalp forgotten, he lay down upon his bed . . . Was victory, real victory, impossible? He had thought Gage his friend. That look of hatred — what was worse, of unutterable distrust — when Gage had accused him of attempting the murder of his friend . . . it was as if he had seen it always. In Babylon. In Egypt. In Spain . . . In that moment the face of that good man had been the very face of force. The weight had many forms.

Of what use, then?

Of all use. The fight must never pause.

The scream sought him as if he were at the bottom of a well. Nadelman fought upward, as if through black waves of oil.

It was his name. "Elias! Nadelman! Elias! For God's sake, come!" It was Gage.

He was standing with his back against the wall, staring at the bed. Gage had left on only the night light on Pelerin's table. Yet even in half-shadow the doctor's ruddy face was gray, his lips loose with fear.

"Look!"

Even as he sprang to the bed Nadelman saw that this time he was too late. The weight had come again. And now it was going. Pelerin's body, slowly lifted by the released pressure of the springs on which he lay, was

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rising. In another second, with a queer limpness, it was free.

"Doctor!" said Nadelman.

With an effort, his movements made unsure by shock, Gage stumbled across the room. When he had listened to Mr. Pelerin's heart he shook his head.

As he put away his stethoscope his hands were shaking. "I fell asleep," said Doctor Gage humbly. "I am responsible."

During a perceptible pause Nadelman did not answer. "The weight, Doctor, made you its ally. The experience, alas, is not unknown. I, too, am guilty. Tonight I became not the defender but the aggressor. By that, I served its purpose and not mine. We must be most vigilant."

Not until the doctor, in the lighted safety of the living-room, had gulped down a copious drink of brandy did he raise his eyes.

"There are some things," he said quietly, "for which you can't say 'I'm sorry.' I thought this hocus-pocus . . . I can't think what got into me." He looked around him at the lovely room. "It's this house, Elias. Now that it's yours, in the name of Heaven, tear it down. Burn it!"

Professor Nadelman shook his head. "No, I shall stay. I shall —" he hesitated for a word: "— contend. And I think that I shall win.

"I do not pretend to understand," the professor went on calmly. "Here there was some focus. A concentration. A distilled and stubborn residue. But cruel force, the will to crush and kill, are as old as man. The forms are infinite. Sometimes open. Far more often, secret. Pelerin was gentle. He would not fight back. One must. *One must!*"

The thin old man smiled sadly, but his mouth was firm.

"I learned that, you see, long before I came here."

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